

Vacation (All I Ever Wanted) by hannahberrie

Series: [first time he kissed a boy \[3\]](#)

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Summary:

Richie glances around at the others to make sure that everyone else is still listening to Bill before he leans in real close to Eddie's ear. "It's just going to be a whole week without any parents around, or any Derry."

Eddie's whole body feels warm. "Yeah, so?"

"Soooo...who knows what could happen?"

In which the Losers decide to take a Spring Break trip to Florida during their last year of high school, and Richie and Eddie try to keep their relationship a secret.

1. Chapter 1

Notes for the Chapter:

Hey, so like the tags mentioned this work has some implied sexual things, nothing graphic, but if that makes you uncomfortable I'm sorry and you have been warned!

Anyway, this is gonna be fluffy (for the most part 🥰)! You don't have to have read the other works in this series to read this one, but it may help!

The first time Richie tells Eddie he loves him is on Richie's 18th birthday. He didn't plan on it going down that way — he'd always pictured it happening during something a lot more romantic and mushy — but it just kinda slips out.

Eddie's just that good.

It's Monday after school and they're alone in his room. He's got the radio playing with the volume turned up high, 'cause Richie's loud in all things, especially this, and if his parents walked in right now he'd literally die.

Richie's gripping onto Eddie's hair with one hand and digging into his sheets with another when he reaches his peak. He sees white lights behind his eyes and he feels like he can barely breathe as Eddie finishes him off with a swallow.

Eddie pulls off of Richie and sits up, wiping at his pouting mouth with the back of his hand. It's the last thing Richie sees before he curses under his breath, arches his back, and falls back on the bed.

“Fuck, Eddie! You’re so fucking amazing! Shit, I love you so fucking much!” He rambles. He doesn’t even hear himself say it — the L-word. All he can think about is how amazing Eddie’s mouth felt, and how he’s definitely the luckiest son-of-a-bitch on the planet right now.

It takes him a couple of minutes to come back down to earth, but when he finally does, he opens his eyes to see Eddie smiling down at him wryly.

“Happy Birthday, Rich,” He says, blushing as he tucks Richie back into his pants.

Richie beams up at him. “Eddie,” He says, too fucked-out to say anything else, “Eddie, Eddie, Eddie!”

“I think you’re broken,” Eddie smiles. He climbs off of Richie and sits on the side of the bed. He leans down and opens up his backpack, digging through the contents inside.

“You broke me!” Richie smiles. He sits up and wraps his arms around Eddie from behind, showering Eddie’s neck with kisses, “You’re fucking incredible, Eds!”

“Thanks,” Eddie blushes as he pulls out some hand sanitizer and Tic-Tacs. He gently pries Richie off of him so he can reach for the glass of water he left on the nightstand and take a drink. He follows it up with two mints before finally cleaning his hands with lemon-scented

hand sanitizer.

He's learned not to take offense to it — it's just what makes Eddie feel safe, and the only way he feels comfortable doing this — but it's still kinda funny to Richie. Eddie could be such a little weirdo sometimes with his little rituals and how crazy he was about cleanliness, but Richie loves him all the same.

It's after that thought that he suddenly remembers his declaration of love from a minute earlier. *Whoops*. He wonders if Eddie heard or thought anything of it.

Eddie puts his stuff away and crawls back into bed with Richie. They wrap their arms around each other and press their foreheads together in a practiced motion.

"Was I good?" Eddie whispers.

"You were fucking amazing!" Richie sighs, kissing Eddie's nose. He probably sounds like a broken record, but he couldn't care less. They've been messing around like this for a few months now and Richie swears that each time is as exhilarating as the first, sometimes even more so.

"Oh," Eddie blushes from the praise, looking pleased.

"It was almost as good of a present as when you got me cupcakes last year!"

Eddie gives him a flat stare. "...*Almost* as good?"

Richie shrugs with an impish grin. "They were really good cupcakes!"

Eddie doesn't look amused. "Apparently."

"Now, if you got me a blowjob AND cupcakes for a present," Richie continues, "Then this would officially be the best birthday ever."

"Ugh." Eddie crinkles his nose. "You're so crude," he mutters, but then he's sitting up and leaning over the bed to dig into his backpack again.

Richie gasps — half ironically, half unironically — as he sits up too. "Eds, you didn't!"

"Shut up." But when Eddie turns to face him again, he's holding a plastic case of six chocolate and vanilla cupcakes, all covered with generous dollops of frosting and rainbow sprinkles.

"They're just store-bought," Eddie admits, "But—"

He's cut off as Richie cups his cheeks and yanks him in for a deep, searing kiss. Eddie lets out a muffled sound of surprise before he starts kissing Richie back. It's kind of sloppy — Richie's still getting

his bearings — but neither of them seem to mind.

“You’re the best boyfriend in the entire history of boyfriends!” Richie exclaims as he pulls away.

Eddie would never admit it, but Richie knows that he loves getting compliments. Maybe it’s because his mom’s given him so much shit for his entire life, but Eddie flourishes under positive attention. Like right now, for example: his gaze is all starry-eyed as he smiles up at Richie. “You’re welcome,” he mutters shyly.

Richie ruffles his hair, which causes Eddie to whine in protest. “Stop that!” He complains, giving Richie a light nudge.

“I can’t help it! You’re so cute, Eds.”

“I’m not *cute*.”

“Fucking hot, then.”

Eddie blushes and nudges him again. He sets the box of cupcakes down on the bed before returning to his backpack and retrieving a box of candles.

“How *romantic*,” Richie simpers sarcastically.

“I’m trying to be festive, idiot! Where’s your lighter?”

Richie leans across him and opens his nightstand drawer. He digs through old movie ticket stubs and polaroids of him and his friends before he finally finds it. “Got it,” he says, tossing it to Eddie and closing the drawer.

“What flavor do you want?”

“Chocolate, duh.”

Eddie carefully picks out a chocolate cupcake and sticks a candle in it. He lights it with Richie’s lighter, and Richie’s genuinely surprised that he doesn’t make some comment about how awful smoking is like he usually does. Maybe he gets birthday-immunity from Eddie’s health concerns.

Eddie sits in front of Richie with his legs crossed and hands the cupcake to him. “Happy Birthday!” He says again.

“You gonna sing for me, Eds?”

“Fuck no.”

Richie pouts, but still accepts the cupcake eagerly. “A beautiful cupcake from a beautiful boy,” he teases, which causes Eddie to start making gagging sounds.

“So cheesy!”

“You love it, Eddie Bear.”

“You wish.”

Richie takes a moment to watch the flame dance, enjoying the faint warmth of its glow and the delicate scent of fresh sugar.

“Are you going to make a wish?” Eddie asks.

But what could he even wish for? He’s got a great job as the school radio DJ, he’s one of the most popular kids on the improv team, he has his own car, he got accepted to his first-choice college in California, and he’s been happily (albeit secretly) dating Eddie for over two years now. His life couldn’t get better.

So what should he wish for?

I wish to always be as happy as I am right now, he decides. But he can’t bring himself to say it aloud; he’s certain that voicing such a wistful and sappy request would definitely jinx everything.

And so, Richie closes his eyes and brings the cupcake closer. “I wish,” he says, pausing for dramatic effect, “For more Kaspbrak blowjobs.

Preferably from Eddie.”

“Are you fucking kidding me?” Eddie says as Richie blows out his candle.

Richie just grins as he tosses the extinguished candle aside and starts eating his cupcake. “It’s the truth,” he says through a mouthful of frosting.

“You’re so fucking obnoxious! Also, everyone knows that if you say a wish out loud it won’t come true, so have fun being celibate the rest of your life.”

“Have fun trying to resist this for the rest of your life then,” Richie winks, motioning to himself.

“Like that’d be hard.”

“You definitely would be. For me.”

“Oh my god.”

Richie leans in and pinches Eddie’s cheek, grinning when Eddie squirms from the frosting fingerprints he leaves behind.

Eventually, Eddie settles down and helps himself to a vanilla cupcake. They both sit on Richie's bed with their backs against the wall and their legs hanging off the side.

Richie looks around his room idly as he finishes his cupcake. He's got posters on the walls from various comedy shows he's been in, the old basement TV from when his parents splurged for a new one, glow-in-the-dark stars on his ceiling, and several of Eddie's things scattered about — random shit like his notebooks and old socks. It's weird to think that he'll be leaving this all behind in September.

"So," Eddie begins, licking frosting off his fingers, "You love me?"

Richie freezes, then winces. "You heard that?"

"I mean, you kinda shouted it, so, yeah." He says it so casually, but Richie can see the smirk he's failing to hide. Smug bastard.

Well, no sense trying to hide it now.

"I do," Richie admits, "I've loved you since we met in the first grade, Eds."

Eddie looks incredulous, but happy. "You're so full of shit!"

"It's the honest truth, Eds. I saw you sitting there with your *Flintstones* lunchbox and thought, yeah, that's the one."

“Alright, Rich.”

Richie eyes him for a second before asking, “Soooooooo...do you love me back?”

Eddie finishes his cupcake and gives Richie a smug look. “Maybe.”

“Maybe?!”

“Haven’t decided yet.”

“You’re such a little shit, Eds.”

Eddie just keeps smirking, completely amused by the entire situation. “You’re such a sap, Tozier.”

“Only ‘cause of you,” Richie says, knocking his foot against Eddie’s, “You’ve ruined me.”

“I try.”

Richie just smiles and leans his head on Eddie’s shoulder. This is one of his favorite spots to be: he can smell fabric softener and — if he

listens closely — he can sometimes even hear Eddie's heartbeat. "Thanks for making today awesome," he says softly.

Eddie raises a hand to cup the side of Richie's head, keeping Richie pressed against him. "Of course, Rich. Anytime."

Richie smirks and glances down at his crotch. "*Any* time?"

"You're literally so gross and annoying!" Eddie laments. He starts poking Richie in random places like his stomach and cheeks. "Where's your 'off' button?"

"Right here," Richie says, giving Eddie another kiss.

"Forgot about that one," Eddie mutters before giving him a kiss in return.

They lean on each other in comfortable silence for a bit after that, perfectly happy to finish off the other cupcakes and listen to the radio.

"Well," Eddie eventually says, "I better get going."

"Want me to get you off first?"

Eddie blushes but shakes his head. "I better not. I have to go help set up—" he pauses, suddenly looking anxious, "....my, uh, room."

Richie eyes him. "You have to set up your room? The fuck's that mean?"

"Clean," Eddie amends, getting off the bed, "I have to *clean* my room."

"Want any help?"

"I'll be fine!"

Richie studies him carefully. "You sure?"

Eddie nods quickly. "Mmhm." He leans forward to give Richie a slightly awkward one-arm hug before grabbing his backpack. "You're still coming to Mike's tonight, right?"

"I guess," Richie sighs, "But I don't see why we have to go over our Spring Break plan AGAIN. Stan probably has the itinerary alphabetized by now."

Eddie holds back a laugh. "Yeah, probably. Just...promise you'll come?"

“Won’t miss it!” Richie assures him, “I’d never pass up on a chance to see my Spagheds.”

“Good,” Eddie says, looking reassured. He gives Richie one last quick kiss and heads toward the door, “See you later, then!”

Two years in and Richie’s still thrilled that Eddie can give him goodbye kisses. Sometimes, he thinks he likes it even more than when they make out. There’s just something so incredible about the fact that Eddie’s his boyfriend and Eddie can give him casual little kisses whenever he wants (relatively speaking).

He gets up and waits by the window to watch Eddie get in his car and back out of the driveway. They make eye contact and wave to each other from afar before flipping each other off, because that’s just how they are with each other.

Richie doesn’t know what heroic act he did in a past life to deserve Eddie Kaspbrak, but he doesn’t think he’ll ever stop being in awe over him.

When Eddie arrives at the Hanlon farm, he’s still pretty anxious. He can’t believe he was stupid enough to almost spoil tonight’s surprise right to Richie’s face.

He parks his car and gets out, and his worry must be evident on his face because when he walks into the barn, Bev can tell right away.

“What’s wrong, Eddie?” She asks, giving him a concerned frown. The other Losers are all spread out around the barn, still in the middle of getting everything ready. When they hear Bev, they stop what they’re doing to look over at Eddie too.

“Nothing!” Eddie says quickly, “I’m fine!”

“You don’t look fine,” Mike counters.

Why are they all staring at him? This is too much pressure. “I...uh...I really am.”

“Y-You can tell us what’s wrong, E-Eddie,” Bill says reassuringly.

“...Fine,” Eddie sighs, “I...I almost spoiled the surprise for Richie, alright?”

“What?!”

“When?!”

“Just now! And I said ALMOST, assholes! I don’t think he knows anything, but I feel like an idiot.”

“D-Don’t sweat it, Eddie,” Bill says, “I’m sure he doesn’t know.”

“Richie doesn’t know shit,” Stan says dryly.

“Why were you with Richie just now?” Beverly asks with a coy smile.

Eddie pales. *Shit.*

“He, uh, wanted my help with homework,” Eddie lies.

“What class?”

“English.”

“Interesting.”

“Well, we told Richie to be here at 7,” Ben cuts in, “And it’s 6 now, so we better hurry.”

“Yeah!” Eddie says, grateful for a way out of this conversation, “Let’s get moving!”

The rest of the set-up goes pretty much without event. They sweep

the barn, blow up balloons (no red ones though, for obvious reasons), set up some snacks and punch, and bring out a boom box.

At 7:15, they see a set of headlights pull into Mike's driveway.

"That's him!" Mike announces.

"Everyone h-hide!" Bill instructs.

As Richie gets out of his car, they all crouch down behind bales of hay or farm equipment. Eddie winds up hiding next to Mike behind the tractor. They exchange conspiratorial grins and try not to laugh.

"Hellooooo?" Richie calls out as he walks toward the barn. "You guys in there?"

The inside of the barn seems to simmer with a hysterical tension as the Losers fight to keep quiet.

"You fuckers better not be screwing with me!" Richie snaps, "All your cars are out front, so I know you're around here somewhere!" He enters the dark barn, a tall lanky silhouette accented with the orange glow of a cigarette butt. "What the fuck? Where is everyb—"

Someone flicks on the lights, and then they all jump out.

“Happy Birthday!”

Richie yells — actually *yells* — as he jumps back from surprise. This leads the rest of the Losers to burst out laughing, causing Richie to blush noticeably.

“Fuck all of you,” Richie says even though he’s smiling. He stomps out his cigarette as he looks around at all the decorations and snacks. “You guys did all this shit for me?”

“T-Turning 18 is a big deal,” Bill says.

“And we love you, Trashmouth,” Bev smiles, walking over to Richie to squeeze his cheek.

“And I love *you*, Miss Marsh!” Richie teases. He makes exaggerated kissing sounds and starts to lean in toward Bev’s cheek. Beverly giggles and steps back quickly, giving Richie a nudge as she does.

Eddie knows Richie’s only kidding, but a lame, petty part of himself gets jealous over that. The feeling quickly passes though: Richie glances over at him and gives him a quick wink, and Eddie feels his cheeks grow warm.

“Well, let’s get this party started, motherfuckers!” Richie announces, raising his hands in triumph.

Ben turns on the music and the party officially begins. They share snacks, joke around, drink punch (which Eddie realizes, two glasses in, that someone definitely spiked), and dance. Richie starts by pulling Bev in for a twirl while *Twist and Shout* plays, but after a few moments of jiving with her, he looks up at Eddie.

“Get in here, Kaspbrak!”

Eddie, leaning against the wall and clutching his glass, is not drunk enough to say ‘yes.’ “No way!” He deflects, glancing at the rest of his friends to make sure none of them are giving him suspicious looks or something.

But Richie doesn’t take no for an answer. He leaves Bev to dance with Ben and makes his way over to Eddie.

“Go away,” Eddie says.

Richie grabs Eddie’s drink and sets it down. “Nope.” And before Eddie can protest some more, Richie’s pulling him back into the makeshift dance circle.

Eddie forces himself to look annoyed as Richie spins him around to the music. Inside though, he feels giddy in the way he always has whenever Richie shows him attention. It’s kind of embarrassing, but even before Eddie knew he liked Richie as more than a friend, he knew that he loved when Richie would go out of his way to tease him and touch him.

His annoyed facade doesn't last long; he finds himself smiling as Richie dips him and laughing as he tries (and fails) to lift Eddie *Dirty Dancing* style. He blames it on his buzz and not the fact that he's totally susceptible to Richie's charm.

Unfortunately (or maybe fortunately), Richie doesn't dance with him long. He pulls in Eddie close one last time to pat him on the back before letting him loose. Eddie sits on a nearby bale of hay, breathless and blushing, as Richie takes turns dancing with Mike and Bill.

Stan's seated nearby, slowing working on his second glass of punch. "He's such an idiot," he says, words slurring slightly as he watches Richie teach Bill the Running Man dance.

"He really is," Eddie smiles.

"I'm going to miss him." And maybe Stan's on more than his second drink, because Eddie knows there's no way Stan would ever say something like that sober.

"What do you mean?" Eddie asks, confused, "Are you going somewhere?"

"We all are!" Stan says, turning to look at Eddie shrewdly, "To college in 6 months!"

Eddie feels himself tensing up. Even though he's excited to go to

school in New York and get the hell out of Derry, the idea of leaving all his friends, leaving *Richie*, makes him physically nauseous. After all, according to the studies he looked into, the average undergrad loses 40% of their friends every six months if their relationships aren't maintained, meaning that by this time next year, he'll have probably lost contact with all but two of the Losers. And the statistics for high school relationships are even worse — less than 2% of people marry their high school sweetheart, which means that he and Richie are probably fucked.

Not like they could ever get legally married anyway.

Eddie hates thinking about this shit — absolutely hates it — but it keeps crawling into his head at the worst times. Like right now, for example. He should be having a fun time celebrating his boyfriend's birthday, and all he wants to do is cry over the inevitable.

Richie dances over and grabs Stan, ignoring Stan's shrieks of protest. Eddie watches as Richie wraps his arms around Stan and sways in place, while Stan stands with his hands at his sides and loudly declares that he's going to murder Richie violently.

Fuck, Eddie's going to miss this so much.

He gets up and goes to get more punch.

It takes half an hour, but Richie eventually dances himself out. He crashes on a pile of hay next to Eddie, panting. “That was fun!”

“You’re so dumb,” Eddie smiles, lying back. He’s even more buzzed now, so much so that his worries from earlier are a mere dull ache in the back of his head.

Richie smiles back at him before turning to the rest of the group. They’re all seated around the barn lazily, each working through their drunken stupor.

“Let’s play Spin the Bottle!” Richie suggests.

He’s hit with a resounding chorus of *no*, *fuck no*, and *hell no*.

Richie slouches back down moodily. “You guys are so boring.” He casually wraps an arm around Eddie and starts running his fingers through Eddie’s hair.

“Stop that,” Eddie mutters, nudging him in case their friends are watching.

It’s kinda weird that they have to hide their relationship from their own friends. Richie’s wanted to tell them several times, but Eddie won’t let him. He’s sure — he *hopes* — that they would be okay with it, but he’s paranoid. The more people that know, the more likely they are to get exposed — that’s just basic probability — and they can’t risk something like that happening in Derry.

Richie gives him a puppy-dog pout, which Eddie hates because it actually works. His heart goes all soft and mushy and Eddie wishes that he could just snuggle up right next to Richie.

He settles for sliding a little closer and letting Richie keep playing with his hair.

“I k-know tonight is for Ri-i-chie,” Bill says, “But I think we shuh-should go over our Spring Break plan one m-more time while we’re all h-here.”

“Again?” Richie sighs, wrapping one of Eddie’s curls around his finger. Eddie sits very still, as if moving too much will deter Richie.

“Yes, Richie!” Stan says impatiently.

“Don’t snap at me, Stanley! It’s my birthday, you have to be nice to me.”

“You assaulted me!”

“Dancing is not an assault!”

“Quiet!” Bill orders, polite but stern. He sits up straighter as he addresses the group, “O-Okay, so our last day of school is Friday.”

“And Florida is a 25-hour drive from here,” Mike adds.

Richie groans. “That’s even longer than my dick!”

“Beep beep, Richie,” Bev says.

“W-We’ll split driving up between Suh-Saturday and Sunday,” Bill recites, “And stay at a h-hotel Saturday night.”

Richie turns to smile at Eddie mischievously. Eddie gives him a disinterested look in return.

“Whatever you think is going to happen,” Eddie whispers, “It’s not going to happen.”

Richie just keeps smiling like he knows something that Eddie doesn’t, which is really annoying honestly. “Uh-huh,” he just says all smugly.

“What?!”

Richie glances around at the others to make sure that everyone else is still listening to Bill before he leans in real close to Eddie’s ear. *“It’s just going to be a whole week without any parents around, or any Derry.”*

Eddie's whole body feels warm. *"Yeah, so?"*

"Soooo...who knows what could happen?"

Richie's voice dips low on that last part, and it really *does* something for Eddie. His breath catches and he swallows nervously. "Oh."

It's not like he hasn't thought about this before. Ever since Mike first proposed the trip, he's been mulling over innocent daydreams of he and Richie holding hands on a beach or taking a nap under a palm tree. Usually, these daydreams ended with them just staying like that — together and peaceful — but there were definitely times where they ended in sloppy make outs. Among other things.

He just didn't know Richie was thinking about the trip like that too. It's kind of terrifying and gut-churning but also exhilarating in a weird way.

Richie smirks and pulls away. Bill is talking about how they'll arrive at the beach house they rented sometime late Sunday, but Eddie can hardly focus, thanks to Richie.

He's pretty used to that by now.

Notes for the Chapter:

I literally just googled random statistics I didn't make them up but yikes am I right?

Anyway, thank you for reading! Comments are appreciated!

2. Chapter 2

The rest of the week takes forever to go by. The entire school is restless as Spring Break draws closer; everyone seems to emanate a jittering, impatient energy. Eddie's never really experienced senioritis before — he doesn't believe in it — but it starts to kick in hard this week. He can hardly focus during his track practices or debate team meetings.

He's just so excited to finally be away from Derry. The last time he left (not counting one-off days like track meets at other schools) was to visit his aunts back when he was in 6th grade. And that doesn't even count since they're only like, an hour away.

He remembers how Richie wrote him a letter, even though he was gone for only a week. When one of his aunts approached him in the mothball-pungent living room and told him that he had a letter, he thought that she was joking (he should've known that no one on his mom's side jokes about anything ever). But sure enough, there was a letter from Richie, filling Eddie in on everything he'd missed in the three days he was gone. It was postmarked with three stamps (so it'd get there fast, according to Richie's letter).

Knowing what Richie told him on Monday — that he supposedly started crushing on Eddie since they met — has forced Eddie to rethink so many things that happened between them growing up. Like, Richie didn't write him that letter just to make jokes about Eddie's mom, but because he *liked* him. The idea is flattering, to say the least. To say the most, it's the cutest thing Eddie's ever heard.

But he can't stop thinking about the other stuff Richie talked about on Monday too. Technically, he didn't say anything specific, but the

whole *who knows what could happen* thing still has Eddie thrown off. Eddie has no clue how far Richie's genuinely expecting things to go on this trip.

To be honest, Eddie's still getting used to blowjobs. He still finds them kind of gross and super germy, and he always feels awkward in the midst of giving one. But he loves how Richie reacts to them — all melty and mushy and moaning Eddie's name. Getting Richie to completely fall apart at his touch is an addicting feeling.

To clarify though, giving them is what weirds him out a little. *Getting* them, on the other hand, is pretty amazing...

Still. He just doesn't think he'd be ready for anything more, if that's what Richie's thinking.

He should just ask him about it, really. But he keeps putting it off until the would-be perfect opportunity literally walks right up to him.

On Thursday after school, Richie stops by the football field to visit Eddie during track practice. He's done this often, claiming he just wants to be supportive, but Eddie's pretty sure that Richie just likes seeing him in his track shorts.

When Eddie sees Richie waving to him off to the side of the field near the bleachers, he stops doing laps and jogs over to him.

"Hey!" Eddie greets, trying to steady his breathing. He stretches his

calves so his joints don't lock up.

"Hey!" Richie echoes. He's smiling at Eddie all sappily with his hands in his pockets. It's a chillier March afternoon and their breaths are coming out in little faint clouds.

"What do you want?"

"I just wanted to see you!" Richie pouts.

"Oh," Eddie blushes. "Sorry, I didn't mean that to sound—"

"Bitchy?"

"Yeah."

"I guess you're forgiven."

"Wow, thanks."

They exchange teasing smiles. Richie leans in to brush his thumb over Eddie's mouth once. It's quick and fleeting and leaves Eddie feeling as electric as if Richie had just kissed him.

“I just wanted to see you before I took off for the day,” Richie explains.

“Aww,” Eddie says dryly, blushing, “How were things at the radio today?”

It’s kinda random, but as they chat, Eddie has a sudden vision of them — very older and very adult — catching up on their workdays over coffee in the morning or during dinner at night. It comes and goes but leaves Eddie feeling warm in spite of the chilly air.

“Same old shit,” Richie shrugs, “Principal Anderson still won’t let me play any songs that are ‘inappropriate,’ whatever the fuck that means. But everyone said that they liked my bit about Mystery Meat Mondays.”

“It *was* pretty funny,” Eddie admits; a rare acknowledgment on his part of Richie’s humor.

(Secretly, he loves when Richie reads the morning announcements and DJs the radio during lunch. There’s nothing like hearing other kids around him laugh at Richie’s jokes and proudly knowing that’s HIS boyfriend.)

“Eds’ approval?” Richie beams, “That’s even better than an Emmy!”

“Don’t get used to it!”

“Too late. I’m going to remember this moment forever!”

“Sometimes I miss when you worked at the diner,” Eddie teases, “Your head was less big.”

“Eh,” Richie smiles and shrugs. “Sometimes I do too. But it’s nice having a job where I don’t have to clean up other people’s dirty ass leftovers.”

“True. No more free milkshakes though.”

“Fuck, I’m still devastated about that.”

Now would be a good time to talk to Richie, right? Like, he’s right here, and he might not get another chance before Saturday to just finally put his worries out in the open...

But...

...he can’t do it. He’s too shy and anxious and it just doesn’t feel right. And also...

...deep

deep

down,

part of him...

...doesn't want to bring it up? Even though he's scared, he's secretly also excited about the idea of *anything* being possible. No more suffocating Derry boundaries, no more chatting three feet apart. Sure, he might not feel ready for *it* now, but what if...what if things were different when they were away? What if he didn't feel so dirty and gross every time they mess around? He doesn't have to shut this door before he even takes a look inside right?

He feels his gut churn as he mulls over this big gray cluster of emotions. And while he's still deciding what to do, the moment passes.

"Well, I guess I'll let you get back to it," Richie says, not-so-subtly checking out Eddie's shorts (*Eddie fucking knew it*).

Eddie nudges him, and Richie raises his gaze and smiles at him all innocently.

"You're cute!" he says quietly, like it's a justification.

"Shut up. I'll see you tomorrow," Eddie mutters, smiling in spite of

himself.

“Only one more day!” Richie grins as he starts to walk away.

“One more day,” Eddie repeats to himself.

He’s interrupted by the shrill shriek of a whistle as his coach orders him to get back on track — literally. Eddie’s blushing red as he resumes jogging laps around the field.

“Focus up, Kaspbrak!” Coach orders.

If only it were that easy.

Richie wakes up at 6 AM on Saturday and doesn’t bother going back to sleep; he’s just so fucking excited. He feels like Eddie as he double and triple-checks that he has everything packed.

He eats a quick bowl of cereal, fending off his parents’ questions (because yes, he’s sure he wants to go, and also, he’s 18 and an adult now and going to be fine).

Bill pulls up in his mom’s minivan around 7:30. Richie hugs his parents goodbye before practically sprinting to the car.

“FUCK YEAH!” He exclaims as he opens the trunk and throws his suitcase inside.

Stan, seated in the passenger’s seat, is wearing sunglasses and snuggled under a blanket. “Stop screaming! It’s too early for this.”

“FLORIDA, FLORIDA, FLORIDA.”

“Drive away, Bill.”

Bill just smiles at their antics as Richie closes the trunk and enters the van from the side.

“Sweet minivan, Bill,” Richie says, “You look just about ready to finish up your Shake n’ Bake and pick up the kiddos from soccer practice.”

“So get in, sport,” Bill jokes in a surprisingly good imitation of Mr. Denbrough.

Richie plops himself into the backseat. He sits in the middle so that his legs will have more room, and because he wants to save a window seat for Eddie.

“I mixed some tapes for the road,” Richie says, passing a handful of

cassette tapes to the front seat.

Bill eyes him. “No b-bullshit?”

Richie raises his hands in self-defense. “Swear! I don’t wanna be stuck in a car for 25 hours with Stan going all psycho.”

“How considerate of you,” Stan says flatly.

“Don’t mention it!”

Next on the roster is Ben. He walks to the car with an eager smile on his face and a Polaroid camera around his neck.

“Lookin’ good, Hanscom!” Richie greets after Ben loads up his bags and climbs inside.

“Thanks,” Ben blushes, “I thought it’d be fun to document our trip! I brought my video camera too.”

“So we can be like *The Real World!*” Richie grins, “Or MTV Spring Break!”

“Richie belongs on a reality show,” Stan says.

“If your idea of an insult is saying I deserve to be famous then you suck at insults, Stanley.”

Bev is next. She says goodbye to her aunt before joining the boys in the car. She looks pretty as always, even though it's so early in the morning. Richie wonders if it's possible for Bev to ever not look pretty.

Ben must be wondering the same, because he's practically catatonic as Bev sits in other middle seat, parallel to Ben. He's blushing like crazy as he turns to her and says, “You look nice, Beverly!”

“Thanks!” Bev smiles back.

“No one wants to sit in the back with me?” Richie cuts in teasingly.

Bev turns in her seat to smile at him too. “I just thought you might want to save a spot for Eddie,” she says innocently.

“W-What?”

“Don't you want him to sit by you?”

Richie doesn't like her look; it feels like she's *up to something*. “Only because the backseat is like, 60-85% safer than the front seats,” he

says defensively, reciting something Eddie's told him a million times.

Bev raises her eyebrows. "You sound just like him!" She says, not sounding surprised at all.

It's like she's challenging him, almost. Well, game on, then.

"What can I say?" Richie shrugs, "I'm Richie Trashmouth Tozier, Master of Voices!"

"Right." Bev just smiles and turns around. Weird.

Finally, Eddie is up next. He's arguing with his mom on the front steps of his house when Bill pulls up.

Sonia is shaking as she continues to speak in one continuous breath: *"Eddie Bear I wish you didn't have to go I still think it'd be better if you stayed with me but oh Eddie Baby did you remember to pack sunscreen you know you need your sunscreen it's so hot down there and you know how easily you burn and the last thing we need is for you to get skin cancer like your great uncle on your father's side and it better be at least SPF 70 or above you know the rules and no eating right before swimming and no staying up late and no bumming cigarettes off that nasty Tozier boy or Marsh girl and no going out after dark and did you remember to pack your sunscreen?!"*

"I have sunscreen, Mommy!" Eddie insists, "Bill's here, I gotta go!"

"Oh, Eddie!" She wails, clutching his arm, "Don't go! That's so far away, and you're so young! Stay with me where it's safe!"

Yikes. Richie hates when he has to witness this shit, he can only imagine what it's like for Eddie.

Eddie yanks his arm away. "You're embarrassing me, Mommy. I gotta go." He kisses her cheek and grabs his suitcases. "I'll call you when we get to the hotel."

His mom is still calling out warnings as Eddie puts his suitcases in the trunk and enters the car.

"Fucking drive, Bill," Eddie says, and this time Bill listens.

Eddie sits down next to Richie, exhaling slowly as he buckles himself in.

"That's rough," Richie says bluntly.

"You have no idea," Eddie mumbles. He offers Richie a tired smile though, relieved. He looks happy to see Richie, which makes Richie feel all sorts of butterflies like a sappy middle-school girl.

They make it all the way around the block before Eddie suddenly

shrieks at a near-deafening volume. The van comes to a screeching vault in the middle of a quiet residential area.

“What the fuck, Eddie?!” Richie winces as everyone covers their ears.

“I forgot my toiletries bag!”

“What?!”

“My toiletries bag! It has everything in it! My toothbrush, my shampoo, my soap—“

“They have that stuff at the hotel!”

“Yeah, but it’s not hypoallergenic! And who knows where that shit even comes from? For all we know, they could just be scraping old jizz off the hotel sheets and putting it in bottles!”

“Gross!” Bev frowns.

“I have to go get it!” Eddie pleads.

“You can’t go back into that house!” Richie exclaims, “Your mom will suck you up like the Blob!”

“And we still need to get Mike,” Stan adds.

“Please?!” Eddie begs, “It’ll just be a minute!” He turns to pout up at Richie all upset and worriedly. He knows it’ll work, and it does. *Of course* it does.

Eddie sad and about to cry is one of the few things guaranteed to activate Richie’s fight-or-flight response every time. He’s been protective over Eddie since their days of skinning their knees on the playground, and Eddie fucking knows it.

He’s so totally whipped for him.

Richie sighs. “Can we go back for it?” He asks Bill.

“Really?” Bill pauses.

“I can run in and get it,” Richie offers, “I won’t let Mrs. K blob me.”

“Since when did you start listening to Eddie?” Stan complains.

Since Eddie started sucking my dick on the regular, Stanley!

“Since I started being an actual human being with apathy and not a fucking robot like you, Stanley!”

“Empathy!” Stan says tiredly, “You meant to say empathy!”

“Empa-suck my dick!”

“Can we just go back and get it?” Ben says.

“We probably could’ve in the time you guys spent arguing,” Bev adds.

“Fine!” Bill sighs, turning the car around, “J-Just no more fighting, please!”

Richie and Stan slouch back in their seats, defeated. Eddie bites down on his lip like he’s trying not to laugh.

“*You’re a monster,*” Richie whispers to him, “*I know your moves, Eds.*”

Eddie just keeps smiling.

Thankfully, getting Eddie’s toiletries bag doesn’t take long. It’s awkward as hell though: Richie walks in through the front door to find Sonia crying into the phone (probably to one of Eddie’s aunts),

about how her precious Eddie-Baby is abandoning her. They make prolonged eye contact as Richie slowly grabs Eddie's bag from the foyer floor and backs out the door.

So, yeah: awkward, but over and done.

"Thank you!" Eddie smiles as Richie rejoins them in the van.

"Was his mom mad?" Ben asks.

"Nah, she was just crying and shit."

"So, the usual?" Stan mutters.

"Pretty much!"

Eddie leans over the backseat to add his bag to the trunk, and Richie basks in the knowledge that he's probably the best boyfriend in the universe now. Eddie's certainly smiling up at him like he is.

Richie genuinely wishes that he could make out with Eddie right now, but he can't think of a joke that would explain it away to his friends.

Hey guys, let's play a road trip game where you pick another person and

then get to kiss them as much as you want for the whole trip! I'll go first and pick Eddie!

He could maybe get Ben behind it, but even that's probably wishful thinking. He pushes the half-baked scheme aside and settles for resting his hand on top of Eddie's.

Lastly, they pick up Mike, who perhaps looks the most excited of all.

"I can't believe we're actually going!" He says as he joins Richie and Eddie in the backseat.

"All thanks to you!" Richie points out.

"Yeah, it was your idea, Mikey," Bev adds.

"Well, I couldn't have done it without you guys," Mike says humbly.

Bill smiles at Mike before glancing at everyone else. "Everyone ready?"

The van erupts into cheers, and even Stan can't help but smile.

"T-Then let's go!"

And they're off.

Richie decides that the only thing more beautiful than the sign reading, *Now Leaving Derry, ME*, is the view of the sunrise as they reach the highway. It fills the car with a warm glow that leaves everyone happy and sedated. Trees pass by, the road stretches on, and every mile marker they pass is bringing them closer to where they belong.

Ben gets some nice footage of the sunrise as well as Bev basking in it. Her hair is extra fiery in its warmth.

Richie watches how shy Ben is as he plays the back the footage he just took to Bev. Bev says that it looks beautiful, and Ben smiles so bashfully he looks like he might explode.

"Do you think Bev likes Ben?" Richie whispers, leaning close to Eddie.

Eddie glances over at her and frowns. *"I don't know; it's kinda hard to tell."*

"Yeah."

“I think she could.”

“Me too.”

They watch Ben fluster himself for a few more minutes before looking back at each other. Eddie’s dark hair looks light brown in the light, and his skin seems to glow. His eyes are big and his gaze is soft as he smiles up at Richie, and the world feels pretty magical for a while.

Once the sunrise passes and breaks its spell, the car seems to come to life. Bill puts in one of Richie’s tapes, and before long, the Losers are singing along to the music and pointing out weird things they see along the side of the road.

When they make their first stop, Richie takes it upon himself to become the official host of Ben’s travel vlog.

“And here we find ourselves STILL in Maine,” he says to the camera, “Because this state is fucking huge, apparently!”

They’re at a gas station near the border of Maine and Massachusetts to stretch their legs and get some snacks. It’s a trucker spot right off the highway, filled with burly guys that look like they could kick Richie’s ass. It’s all kinda grimy and Richie loves it (Eddie, unsurprisingly, looks terrified of touching anything as they walk inside).

“And just think, we still have TEN more states to go through!” Richie continues, still talking to the camera.

“Only te-technically,” Bill says as Richie and Ben come up beside him by the coffee machine, “Some stuh-states like Delaware and N-New Hampshire we’ll just pass through the t-tip of.”

“Ben, title this documentary, *Just the Tip!*”

“I don’t think so, Richie,” Ben blushes.

“How can you drink that stuff?” Eddie complains to Bill as he walks up to them.

Bill eyes him. “I need energy.”

“From gas station coffee?” Eddie grimaces.

“I-It’s just regular coffee, Eddie.”

“From a *gas station*. Did you know that gas station pumps have 11,000 times more bacteria than a toilet seat?! *11,000!*”

“You know we’re gonna be stopping in a million places like this, right?” Richie reminds him.

“...Yeah,” Eddie admits grumpily, “So?”

Richie drags his hand across the sticky coffee station counter a few times before he uses it to lightly hit Eddie’s cheek. “So, better get used to it then!”

Needless to say, he barely makes it out of the gas station alive. Eddie’s still trying to murder him outside after they’ve all bought snacks and are getting back into the van.

“You’re so fucking disgusting!” Eddie says over and over, punching Richie in the arm. He tries to climb on Richie’s back, but Richie is way taller, and therefore better at this.

“Get off!” Richie laughs, easily pushing him away.

“You think this is funny, dickwad? You got germs on me!”

“All 11,000 of them!”

He’s not sure if they’re pretending to bicker or actually bickering. Ever since they started secretly dating, it’s been kinda hard to tell when Eddie’s annoyed and when Eddie’s just pretending to be annoyed.

“Do you guys want me to sit between you?” Mike genuinely offers. He’s holding the van door open and waiting for them to get inside.

Richie and Eddie pause.

“No!” Eddie says, way too quickly and way too disappointed-sounding for someone who’s supposedly pissed off.

Which means he’s not actually that mad at Richie, even after getting a faceful of germs. Man, maybe Richie isn’t the only one who’s whipped around here.

The realization causes him to grin like an idiot. Eddie, seemingly reading his mind, points an angry finger at him. “Shut the fuck up!” He climbs into the car and takes his seat by the window.

“I didn’t say anything!” Richie smiles, following him.

“You guys are being weird,” Mike says, furrowing his brow as he gets inside too.

“We’re always weird!” Richie counters.

“Good point.”

Eddie folds his arms across his chest and says nothing. He might actually be mad that Richie knows he's not mad, so Richie decides to call a truce. As hilarious and easy as it is to rile Eddie up, he doesn't wanna wind up in Miami a single man.

"I brought my Game Boy," he offers as soon as they're back on the highway and the other Losers are chatting amongst themselves.

Eddie chews on the inside of his lip.

"If you wanna play."

Eddie's still all pouty, so Richie pokes his stomach, and like pressing a button, Eddie gives in. "Okay," he says, smiling reluctantly.

There's a word Richie learned in English class that he feels describes his relationship with Eddie well:

Tumultuous. Loud, excited, and emotional.

His English teacher made it seem like it was a bad thing, but Richie thinks it's spectacular. Because it sums up how things have always been with Eddie: fast and exciting and *loud*. Fighting one minute, pining after each other the next. Even though he's only 18, he knows he'll never find what he and Eddie have with anyone else.

Richie bends over to dig through the backpack sitting by his feet and

gets his Game Boy out.

“I’m totally gonna crush your Zelda high score,” Eddie brags.

“That’s not how it works,” Richie smirks.

“Shut up.” Eddie grabs the Game Boy and within twenty minutes, both he and Richie are completely absorbed in the game. It makes the hours go by a lot faster, and it gives Richie an excuse to lean on Eddie (because he needs to be able to see the screen, obviously).

Even with the distraction of video games, the day is long and tiresome. Richie’s never sat in one place for this long in his entire life.

The states drag by — New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Jersey — interrupted only by gas stations, rest stops, McDonald’s, and more gas stations. The Losers try to keep each other entertained with *Would You Rather*, *20 Questions*, and *Never Have I Ever*.

Sometime in between *Would You Rather* and the Maryland border, Richie passes out. When he eventually wakes up, it’s dark outside and the car isn’t moving.

“Wha-“ he mumbles tiredly, getting a mouthful of Eddie’s hair. Eddie is snoring beside him, his head tucked under Richie’s chin.

Richie absentmindedly raises a hand to rub Eddie's arm. "Where are we? What time is it?"

"Virginia," Stan says from the front seat, "9:00." All of the other Losers, sans Bill, are slumped in their seats with fatigue.

"We made it to the hotel," Bev adds, "Bill's inside getting us a room."

"Kinky," Richie mumbles. He yawns loudly, causing Eddie to stir.

Eddie sits up straighter and stretches, displacing Richie. "Are we there yet?" He asks sleepily, before frowning and touching his face with caution. "Gross!" He exclaims, wiping his cheek. He turns to look up at Richie accusingly, "You drooled on me!"

"Whoops."

"You guys looked cute, though," Bev teases.

"Whaddya mean?" Richie yawns again.

Bev nudges Ben, and Ben hands them over a Polaroid. "Beverly told me to take a picture."

Richie takes it. He and Eddie lean in close to look at it together,

straining to see it in the light coming from the parking lot lamps.

In the picture, they're both leaning on each other. The whole photo is really high contrast, on account of the dark car being illuminated by Ben's camera flash. Eddie's head is tucked under Richie's, and Richie's mouth is hanging open in a visible snore.

"I look so dumb," Eddie complains.

"Well, I'm keeping this," Richie smiles, putting the photo into his pocket, "I gotta have proof when I tell everyone I slept with Eddie Kaspbrak!"

Even though the car is dark, Richie can easily see how red Eddie blushes. He starts swatting at Richie angrily, trying to land a blow to wherever he can reach. "Fuck you, dude!"

Richie tries to grab his hands and fails. "Fuck you!"

They're interrupted by the sound of the van door sliding open. Bill leans in, looking tired but accomplished.

"You guys r-ready?"

"Yes!" Stan exclaims, "Get me out of this car!"

Seven Losers, one hotel, Richie muses as Eddie gives him one last shove and nudges past him to exit the van, *now THIS is going to be interesting*.

Notes for the Chapter:

What will happen at the hotel? 🤖 Stay tuned to find out!

Also growing up I had to go on so many family road trips so writing this chapter gave me PTSD. Anyway I hope you guys are liking this so far! For some reason I felt so eh writing this chapter so idk how I feel about it I think I just need a nap.

3. Chapter 3

Notes for the Chapter:

The more I write the more I realize that this story has like 0 plot it's just a big ol bunch of fluff strung together by more fluff. Whelp!

They're standing in the lobby in a semi-circle around Bill, holding the handles of their suitcases, when Bill shows them the room keys.

"I got us two rooms," he says.

Beverly frowns. "Why two?"

Bill blushes and gives her a shy, but pointed, look.

"What?" She says, joking, "You guys don't want me rooming with you?"

When Bill says nothing, she pouts in confusion.

"Seriously? Why?"

"I-It's not that I don't want you to...I just thought that it'd be polite."

“You guys have seen me at the quarry a million times!” She exclaims indignantly, “We’ve had sleepovers!”

“Yeah, but a hotel room is different.”

Bev turns to look at the other boys. “You guys think this is dumb, right?”

Eddie and the rest of the boys all avoid eye contact, cheeks red. Eddie gets what she’s saying, but it somehow does feel different, in an inexplicable way. He knows that his mom would kill him if she found out he shared a hotel room with a girl (even though, all things considered, she should probably be more concerned that he’ll be sharing a room with one very handsy Trashmouth).

“Really?” Bev frowns.

“It’s the polite thing to do,” Ben offers shyly.

“You guys are dorks,” Beverly sighs. She takes the key from Bill and starts walking to the elevator.

“Sorry, Bev!” Mike calls out.

“Yeah, yeah,” Bev waves them off.

The boys follow her — their rooms are all on the third floor — and cram inside the elevator with her.

“Let’s unpack and check out the pool!” Bill says in an attempt to get everyone excited.

Eddie crinkles his nose. *Public Pools* is up there on his list of most disgusting things, right along with *Porta-Potties* and *Water Parks*. Guess he’ll just watch TV tonight or something.

They make it to the third floor and head to their rooms. The more they’re out of the van and moving around, the more awake they seem to become. There’s less yawning and more amiable chatter.

“See you guys at the pool!” Bev says before entering her room, “Last one there is a loser!”

“I thought we were all losers,” Ben mumbles to no one in particular.

Bill stops one door over and swipes his key card through the lock. It blinks green, and they hear a click.

When the guys enter their room, they find two queen-sized beds and one couch. The boys hover in the doorway, all eyeing one another awkwardly.

“I-I guess four of us can share the beds,” Bill says, “And one of us can

take the couch. And then someone else...uh....”

“I call sharing with Eddie!” Richie exclaims.

The other boys turn to look at Eddie all expectantly. At first, Eddie feels confused and put on the spot, but then he realizes that they’re expecting Eddie to be super annoyed and overreact to Richie’s declaration like he normally would. And he’s currently just...staring back at them, saying nothing, totally fine about it.

Oh.

“Ugh!” He says with what is hopefully a believable grimace, “Gross! No fucking way!”

“Too late,” Richie sighs happily, “I called dibs!”

“I could take the floor,” Bill offers.

“That wouldn’t be fair,” Mike frowns, “You’re doing all the driving; you need to rest, Bill.”

“I can take the floor,” Ben says.

“No, I can!” Mike counters.

“I brought a sleeping bag,” Ben insists.

Richie eyes him. “Why?”

“You never know when you might need one on a trip,” Ben shrugs.

Clearly, he’s not wrong.

“Are you s-sure?” Bill asks.

Ben nods. “It’s just for one night.”

“Alright then,” Bill decides, “Ben will use his sleeping bag, and then I can share with someone.”

“I’ll take the couch,” Mike says firmly, “Stan can share.”

“Thanks, Mike,” Stan says, looking relieved.

The room itself is pretty generic. Tan walls, a small TV, a bible and notepad in the dresser, landscape paintings above the beds. Directly across from the beds is a door to the bathroom, which is furnished with a pink-tiled shower and sink.

Eddie immediately gets to work on stripping the sheets off of his and Richie's bed. Richie sets his suitcase down in the corner of the room and watches him, visibly confused.

"What the fuck are you doing, Eds?"

Eddie frowns at him. "I'm changing the sheets, obviously."

"What, like you brought your own?"

"Of course! We don't know where these ones have been!"

"Probably in a washing machine."

"Probably isn't good enough, Rich." He carefully folds up the hotel sheets and gets to work replacing them with the ones he brought. Richie watches him the whole time with a vague sort of amusement.

"The things I put up with," he sighs dramatically.

"Shut up."

The other boys make quick work of getting their things unpacked.

Apparently, they don't seem bothered by sleeping on a surface that hundreds of other people have already slept on, which Eddie could never understand.

As he finishes up, the boys are taking turns going into the bathroom to change into their swim trunks, Richie included.

"See you downstairs!" They call out to each other as they exit the room one-by-one. Eventually, they've all gone down to swim, leaving Eddie and Richie alone.

Richie comes out of the bathroom in a neon set of swim trunks that are covered in colorful triangles and squiggly lines. They're ridiculous, but very Richie.

"How do I look?" Richie asks, flexing his skinny arms.

Eddie stops digging through his suitcase to look up at Richie with a smile. He looks over Richie's pale lanky frame, the hints of chest hair, scattered freckles. "Dumb."

"Which is Eddie-speak for *hot*."

"It's literally not!" Eddie exclaims, even though it kind of is. He takes some of his toiletries and goes to arrange them on the bathroom counter. As he sets everything up, he glances at himself in the mirror, trying not to think about how the rest of his friends are going to have fun without him.

Richie follows him in, looking curious. “Are you coming to the pool?” he asks, making eye contact with Eddie in the mirror.

“No way!” Eddie scoffs, looking back, “Public pools are literally cesspools of bacteria! If you think they’re clean cause of the chlorine, guess what? They’re not! It’s basically one giant petri dish! Hotel pools especially! There’s a 1 in 6 chance you’re swimming in fecal matter, urine, and waterborne illness like shigella!”

“I’m pretty sure you’re just making shit up.”

“No, I’m not! These are FACTS.”

“Eddie,” Richie says, surprisingly patiently, “The point of a vacation is to have *fun*! Not stay in your room all cooped up because of germs.”

“I know!” Eddie defends, “But I just think it’s gross, okay? I can wait to swim until we get to the beach.”

“I’m pretty sure the bathroom you share with your mom has more ‘fecal matter’ germs than this pool will.”

Eddie nearly gags at the thought. “Gross!”

“These are FACTS,” Richie echoes in a shitty impression of Eddie’s voice.

Eddie glares at him through the mirror. “Shouldn’t you be going now?”

“Aw, c’mon, don’t be like this, Eds,” Richie whines, stepping closer, “It won’t be the same without you!”

“It’ll be fine, Rich. I just don’t want to and there’s nothing you can really do to convin—“

Richie ducks his head and starts kissing Eddie’s neck. As Eddie pauses mid-rant, he holds Eddie’s hips and slowly starts rocking into them.

“Richie?” Eddie freezes. “Wha—what are you doing?” He often forgets that Richie has the attention span of a goldfish. Also, Richie kinda gets turned on whenever they fight. It makes staying mad at him extremely difficult.

“I haven’t kissed you since Monday,” Richie whines, “I’m going crazy, Eds! You’re so hot when you’re mad!”

Eddie feels his eyes start to close even though he doesn’t even want them to. He was in the middle of making a solid argument, and yet Richie has the power to suddenly make him forget the English language. It’s not fucking fair. “You are crazy,” he mumbles nonsensically.

Richie keeps kissing him, so Eddie tilts his neck back to give Richie easier access. What was he even mad about again? He suddenly can't remember.

"Do you know how hard it's been?" Richie mutters, "Sitting so close to you for hours in that van and not being able to do anything?"

Eddie makes a noise — he's not sure what the hell it is, maybe a gasp or sigh — as Richie keeps rocking their hips together. He can certainly start to *feel* how hard it's been for Richie. "Y-You did plenty," he says breathlessly, "You annoyed the shit out of me! You still are!"

Richie smiles against Eddie's pulse point. "And you annoy the shit out of me! We're perfect for each other."

"You're lucky I haven't broken up with you," Eddie hums.

"I'm very lucky," Richie echoes, "Because my boyfriend's fucking hot."

Eddie blushes. He opens his eyes and catches his reflection in the mirror in front of him. His eyes are dark and his face is flushed. He doesn't see himself as *hot* (or gorgeous, beautiful, amazing, spectacular, or any of the other words Richie whispers into his ear whenever they're like this) but Richie has a way of making him feel like he is.

He turns around to meet Richie's mouth. Richie pushes him up against the counter, and the tiled edge is digging into Eddie's ass, but he's happy. He cups Richie's face and kisses him deeply, Richie still rutting against him as he kisses back.

Richie's hand starts wandering blissfully lower, but when it starts to slip beneath the waistband of Eddie's jeans, Eddie pulls back.

"Please, Eds?" Richie whines.

"I'm not doing this right now!" Eddie blushes, "Not in some gross hotel bathroom!"

(He hates thinking it, but sometimes a stupid part of him wonders if this is all Richie wants him for. Just someone to kiss and ogle. It's not like he's complaining, or anything, and he knows it's *probably* not true...

But that *probably* is persistent.)

"You don't have to do anything," Richie points out, raising a hand to cup Eddie's chin, "Just gotta stand there and look pretty." He pulls him in for another kiss that Eddie indulges longer than he most likely should.

Eddie pulls back and smiles wryly at Richie. "Our friends will notice

if we've been gone for too long."

"So what?"

"So, I don't want them to ask questions; I hate having to lie and shit. Also, I'm fucking bad at it."

"You're the best at getting handjobs, my love!"

"I meant at *lying*, dickbrain," Eddie says, nudging him.

"Oh yeah, you are pretty shit at that."

Eddie nudges him again, and Richie kisses his forehead in apology.

"Will you at least come swimming with us?" He asks, pouting his lip all mopey.

Eddie sighs. "Fine," he gives in, reluctantly. There *was* only a 1 in 6 chance, after all, and this hotel seemed to be pretty quiet so far, so maybe not that many people had even used the pool...

"Sweet! Love you," Richie says simply, giving him another quick kiss. It makes Eddie's heart skip and his breath catch. He loves hearing Richie say those words, loves feeling in it every touch Richie gives

him, love how it shoos away the *probably*. He just loves Richie, the entire loud, vibrant mess of him.

He likes this game he's invented though: keeping Richie on his toes. He's not sure he wants to give it up yet.

So, when Richie smiles at him all expectantly, Eddie just smiles right back, lips pressed together firmly.

"Really?"

Eddie smirks.

"I'll get you to say it," Richie vows, pointing a finger at Eddie, "I swear I fucking will!"

"Good luck with that," Eddie teases.

"Hmph." Richie walks out of the bathroom and plops down on their bed. "Hurry up and get your cute lil ass in some swim trunks, Eduardo! ¡Andale!"

"Don't snap at me," Eddie huffs, "Or we won't finish this later."

Richie sits up in bed, so fast that it's almost comical. "Later?" He

asks, gaping at Eddie through the doorway.

Eddie gives him a small smile that neither confirms or denies anything.

“Fuck, Eds,” Richie nearly whimpers. He falls back on the bed, clutching his heart. “You’re such a tease! I can’t wait till we get our own room in Florida!”

Eddie wants to stop himself, he really does, but the words slip out easily. “That’s not all you care about, right?”

Richie props himself up on his elbows and looks at him again. “Whaddya mean?”

Eddie fidgets in place, runs a hand through his hair. “Like...blowing me and shit.”

“You think I don’t care about you?”

“No, I just — ugh, never mind, forget it, it’s dumb.”

“No!” Richie gets up quickly and rejoins Eddie in the bathroom. Before Eddie can process what’s happening, Richie’s wrapping his arms around Eddie’s waist and hugging him tightly.

Eddie feels his doubts start to melt away at Richie's warmth.

Richie pulls back only to look at Eddie's face. "I love everything about you, Eddie! And, I mean, yeah, your dick is fucking amazing, but it's not just about that. I'd be fine never seeing it again as long as I get to see you every day for the rest of my life."

"Really?"

"Mmhm. Who else would I play video games and trade comics with? Or practice my stand-up routines with, or talk shit with?"

"One of our other five friends?"

"But I need *you*, Eds, you're my best friend!"

Eddie feels like someone lit a fire inside him. Not a passionate, raging one, but one that's warm and steady and kindling. He stands on tiptoe and kisses the corner of Richie's mouth. Richie turns his head, and then they're kissing properly and innocently, like they're 13 again and still learning their feelings for each other.

"Thank you," Eddie murmurs after they pull apart.

"Of course," Richie murmurs back.

“You’re my best friend too,” Eddie smiles, nudging him a little.

“Numero uno?”

“Yup.”

“Wow,” Richie sighs contently, “Lemme just take a second to let that sink in!”

“You’re such a dweeb!” Eddie smiles broader. He gives Richie a light push out of the bathroom. “Now get out; I’m gonna get changed.”

“Can I watch?” Richie grins.

Had they been in Derry, Eddie would’ve said *no fucking way* in a heartbeat. But they’re not in Derry, they’re somewhere in the middle of Virginia, and it’s just them. And now, after hearing how much Richie truly loves him, that somewhat ironically makes Eddie more physically attracted to him.

And so...*fuck it*.

“Just...keep your hands to yourself,” Eddie says, voice low.

Richie feels like he deserves a fucking Nobel Peace Prize after the self-restraint he just displayed. How he managed to watch Eddie strip down and change into his little red swim trunks without mauling him can only be due to divine intervention.

But, as promised, he stays seated on their bed and keeps his hands to himself as Eddie gets ready, and then it's time to head down to the pool.

They exit the room, both blushing and avoiding each other's gaze a little. As they walk down the hallway, Richie takes advantage of the opportunity to admire Eddie's physique.

Sometime during the summer between freshman and sophomore year, he'd shed his baby fat like it was a second skin. His chubby cheeks and little tummy receded into cheekbones and actual abs. He's not like, ripped or anything, but thanks to joining the track team at the end of sophomore year, he's totally toned in all the right places.

Richie feels like he just got more gangly and more tall, while Eddie's basically on that Greek-God level shit, so like, what the fuck.

Eddie glances over his shoulder as they make it to the elevator. "What?" He asks, obviously noticing Richie staring.

Richie's initial reaction is panic; because getting caught staring at a very shirtless Eddie in public is a Very Bad Thing. But then he

remembers that none of their classmates are around to eavesdrop, and the hotel hallway is empty and quiet. So, there's nobody around to judge, and there's nothing stopping him from being as candid as he wants.

"Oh nothing," Richie sighs, "Just mentally waxing poetic about your abs, Eddie, my love!"

"You're so weird," Eddie replies, looking flustered.

But not so weird that Eddie doesn't start making out with him on the elevator ride down, Richie is happy to note.

"What's gotten into you, Eds?" Richie says appreciatively as they exit the elevator.

"I'm just happy to be away from Derry," Eddie smiles shyly.

"We should go on vacations more often, then."

"We should."

"Where would you wanna go?" Richie asks. He walks close to Eddie so that their arms brush as they walk. "Like, if you could go anywhere in the world."

“I dunno,” Eddie shrugs. “Europe? I guess? They have a lot of really clean cities over there, like in Switzerland, I think.”

“I can just see you now,” Richie sighs, “European Eds: Visiting the Eiffel Tower and cleaning it off with a Lysol wipe!”

“No shit I would! Millions of people visit it every year! It’s probably covered in bacteria!”

“We could drink in Europe,” Richie says, “You only have to be 18 there.”

“We drink now!”

“Yeah, but we could do it *legally*. Like in one of those fancy casino bars in James Bond movies.”

“True.”

“I could get a suit!” Richie croons, tightening an imaginary tie. He winks at Eddie and makes his voice low and sultry, “The name’s Tozier, Big Dick Tozier.”

“You’d look stupid in a suit!” Eddie laughs, but he’s blushing in a way that makes it seem like he doesn’t think it’d look stupid at all.

Richie and Eddie reach the door that leads out to the pool. As they push it open and enter, Richie's relieved to see that the Losers are the only ones out here.

The pool is outside the back of the hotel. It's gated off by a tall black fence; beyond that, shrubbery, and farther out and down a hill, they can see the strip of expressway as well as the bright, streaming beams of headlights. The pool itself is lit from below, making their friends' faces glow a surreal blue. The warm water mixes with the chilly night air in steaming clouds.

Their friends look up from their swimming and splashing as Richie and Eddie walk over. Eddie keeps glancing at the pool all nervously like it's going to bite him or something.

"What took you so long?" Bill asks.

"You know Eds," Richie shrugs, "I had to drag his ass out here because he wouldn't stop crying over fake germs."

"Shigella is real, Richie!" Eddie frowns. "And I didn't fucking cry, you
—"

Richie cuts him off by scooping Eddie into his arms, walking towards the edge of the pool, and tossing Eddie in.

Eddie's yelling something obscene before he goes under, swallowing a mouthful of water in the process.

Richie sets his glasses down on a nearby plastic chaise — the world is blurrier without his glasses on; he kind of likes it that way. Everything looks like one of those weird Impressionist paintings he had to study in art class. After making sure that his glasses are tucked away, he cannonballs into the pool. He doesn't *intend* to splash Stan dramatically in the process, that's just a bonus. But it does mean he now has two very angry Losers out to drown him.

"Leave me alone!" Richie laughs as Stan and Eddie chase him around the pool. He swims up to Beverly and grabs her, using her as a human shield.

"Richie!" Beverly laughs, "What are you doing?"

"You're a dead man, Tozier!" Stan says as he and Eddie swim over.

"They're trying to kill me!" Richie complains.

"Finally," Bev teases. She moves out of the way like the traitor she is, giving Stan and Eddie all the access to dunk him as much as they want.

As they shove him under the water, Richie flashes back to all the times he and Eddie did this back in the Quarry. Back then, he was so terrified that if Eddie knew his feelings, their friendship would be ruined. But now they're together and they're still goofing off like they used to, and it's so surreal and fantastic that Richie's heart wants to burst.

How whipped do you have to be for someone to be happy that they like drowning you for fun?

After Stan and Eddie get their revenge, they swim off to go be by the others.

Richie needs to catch his breath, so he swims up to Mike, who's hanging out at the edge of the pool and watching the headlights beyond.

"It's kind of cold here," Richie says, "Hopefully, it'll be warmer in Florida."

"It will be," Mike replies. His voice is all soft and wistful, "I looked it up before we left: 70-80 degrees all week."

Richie whistles. "And it was fucking 30 when we left Maine! Maybe I'll move to Florida with you, Mikey."

"I'm sure California will be just as warm."

"Yeah! My Hawaiian shirts will be in fashion all year round!"

"I don't know about that," Mike grins. He focuses back on the passing cars, slowly returning to being all reflective and serious.

“So...” Richie says slowly, eyeing the side of his face, “Why do you wanna go to Florida so bad? I know you said before that you didn’t really know, but—“

“It’s as far south from Derry as you can get,” Mike shrugs.

“That’s all the reason you need!” Richie jokes.

Mike isn’t smiling though. “I dunno...I just wanted to be out of there. The longer I’m there, the more I feel like...there’s something wrong with that town.”

Richie pouts. “But we fixed the wrongness! That fucker is dead!”

“I know,” Mike says, but he doesn’t sound certain, “But it’s still a bad place. I feel like there’s this dark cloud hanging over the whole town. It makes it hard to breathe — hard to even think, sometimes.”

Richie swallows nervously.

“Can I tell you something?” Mike asks, turning to look at him.

““Course, Mike, anything!”

“Ever since we left, I’ve felt so much better. Like I’m finally myself again.”

Richie thinks about how easily and confidently he’s been able to flirt with Eddie over the past couple hours, and how open Eddie’s been with him. Like they’re no longer afraid, or at least, a lot less so. “I know what you mean.”

“Isn’t that weird?”

“I think you’re just excited,” Richie shrugs, “We all are.”

“Yeah, I guess so,” Mike nods, turning to watch the cars some more.

“Richie, Mike!” Bill calls out from the other side of the pool, “W-We’re going to have a cannonball contest!”

“Alright, lighten up, Mike-a-million! Let’s go!” Richie says as he claps Mike on the back.

Mike smiles appreciatively as he follows Richie toward the others.

The boys are lined up by the long side of the pool, while Bev is sitting off to the side by the deep end. Her freckled legs hang into the water, making lazy shapes.

“Bev’s going to judge us!” Ben explains as Richie and Mike get out of the pool and line up with everyone else.

Richie turns to call over to her, “Now’s your chance to redeem yourself, traitor!” He teases, to which Bev just flips him off with a smile.

The boys all take turns trying to make the biggest cannonball possible. Stan’s is laughably dainty. Bill’s is pretty standard. Mike’s is impressive, which makes him a front runner. Richie’s, in his opinion, is clearly the best, but no one else seems to agree.

After Eddie makes a totally normal-sized cannonball, he comes up for air grinning confidently. “Did you see that?!” He exclaims, “I totally made the biggest one!”

“Yeah, right!” Richie laughs.

“*I did!*”

“It’s physically impossible for you to make the biggest one,” Richie tells him plainly.

“How the fuck?”

“Because you’re so little,” Richie shrugs, motioning with his hands, “You got no surface area, Eds.”

And then Eddie's trying to drown him again, but that just means that Eddie's wet bare chest is pressed up against Richie's back, and his hands are tangled in Richie's hair, so like, who's really losing here?

They stop messing around once Ben steps up to the edge of the pool. As the last contestant, this is going to be the deciding jump!

The cannonball to judge all the balls, Richie thinks with a stupid smile.

Eddie's still behind him. As he waits for Ben to jump, he casually wraps his arms around Richie's neck and his legs around Richie's waist. He doesn't even seem to realize he's doing it — he's still totally focused on the contest. Plus, he's not freaking out about the fact that this is kind of crossing the just-friends line, and that the Losers could see them.

Like he's no longer afraid.

Richie holds him in place, keeping him locked in a weird sort of unmoving piggyback ride.

Then again, maybe it's not that Eddie's not afraid. Maybe he's just doing what's normal for them. After all, ever since they first became friends, they'd always been closer than they probably should've been.

For some reason, Richie can't remember anything specific moments,

but his memories are filled with the ghosts of touches they've shared: holding hands during recess, fingers brushing as they exchange ice cream cones, Eddie laying his head on Richie's lap while they watch movies.

They've always been like the way they are now, he realizes, it just didn't always mean the same things.

He turns his attention back to Ben, whose face is set with determination and focus.

"You've got this, Ben!" Bev calls out encouragingly.

"You know he just wants to impress Beverly," Eddie whispers into Richie's ear. His lips brush against Richie as he says it, and it almost feels like a kiss.

"Duh!" Richie whispers back, "It's so obvious!"

"I'm glad we're not that obvious," Eddie says proudly.

"Yeah, we're sneaky as fuck!"

They watch as Ben takes a deep breath. He backs up, gets a running start, and —

SPLASH! Ben hits a home run! It's out of the park! One for the record books! Richie swallows a mouthful of water as the aftershocks disrupt the entire pool. He can feel Eddie's grip tighten around him as he fights to hold on.

"Jesus, Hanscom!" Richie sputters, blinking water out of his eyes.

"I think we have a winner!" Bev cheers. She jumps into the water and swims over to Ben. Grabbing one of his hands in hers, she lifts his arm in victory. "Ben!"

Ben looks like he just won the lottery.

"Nice job, Ben!" Bill says appreciatively.

"Thanks," Ben replies, perfectly humble and impossible to be mad at.

"I declare Ben King of the Balls!" Richie proclaims.

No one else seems to find his joke as funny as he does. It does call attention to his and Eddie's current situation though.

You know, the whole piggybacking thing. It probably doesn't help that there's a new development too: the whole, Eddie's-currently-smoothing-back-Richie's-water-slicked-hair-all-affectionately thing.

Bev eyes them curiously. “What are you guys doing?”

Eddie freezes, his hands still in Richie’s hair.

Richie thinks fast. “Getting ready to play a game of chicken! Why don’t you and Benjamin get over here and fight us like real men!”

And that’s how Richie, Eddie, Bev, and Ben decide to play a game of chicken.

Ben lifts up Bev on his shoulders, and Richie lets Eddie sit on his.

As Eddie gets comfortable, Richie thanks every deity he can think of for there being a pool game that lets him hold onto and be surrounded by Eddie’s bare thighs the whole time.

“This isn’t fair!” Eddie frowns as Richie walks them closer to Ben and Bev, “I can’t hit Bev! She’s a girl!”

“Then I guess you already lost!” Bev smiles.

“C’mon, Eds! Kick her ass!” Richie calls up to Eddie.

Eddie swallows and nods seriously.

Ben and Richie's gazes meet, and Richie doesn't need his glasses to see that Ben's entire face is beet red. Guess he's not the only one thanking the chicken-inventor gods.

Unfortunately, the game doesn't last long. Eddie's still too nervous to hit Bev, so Bev easily overpowers him, and the game ends.

After that, Bill's the first to get tired, probably because of all the driving, and the rest of the Losers soon follow suit.

They leave the pool bundled in towels, hair dripping and teeth chattering. They change into their pajamas and gather in the boys' room to order a pizza. When the pizza finally arrives, they lounge on and around the beds, devouring pizza slices and watching HBO and MTV till their brains feel like mush and they're all yawning. It feels so middle school, but there's something so immensely comforting about that.

"Time for bed," Bill yawns around midnight.

"Got another long drive tomorrow," Mike says sympathetically.

"I have an extra bed in my room," Bev reminds them, "You guys wouldn't have to crowd in here if you'd just stop being so stubborn."

The boys stay stubborn.

Bev retires to her room, the lights turn off, and within minutes after everyone brushes their teeth and washes up, Bill's snores are filling the room. Richie makes a mental note to be extra nice to Bill tomorrow for all the hard work he's done.

Richie takes off his glasses and sets them down on the nightstand before getting under the covers. Eddie slides in beside him, his legs brushing against Richie's as he tries to get settled. It's dumb, but even little touches like that make Richie's heart go all WOOSH.

Their eyes meet as they both lie down, and they smile. Eddie's wearing baby blue pajamas with little clouds on them.

"Cute pj's," Richie whispers, tugging on the shirt.

"Shut up," Eddie whispers, resting his head on his pillow, "Go to sleep."

And so Richie does.

Or at least, he *tries* to. But who can blame him for not being able to? He's got the cutest boy in the world lying only a few inches away from him, and his freckles are prominent and his lips are looking irresistibly soft, and those pajamas are so adorable Richie really wants to get his hands all over them.

He can hear his friends drift off one by one: Bill, then Stan, then Mike, then Ben. After having sleepovers with them for over half a decade, he can tell what they sound like when they're knocked out.

He shuffles in place a bit, trying to get comfortable. The room is lulled with the steady sound of the fan attached to the wall, and he can still hear cars driving along the expressway in the distance. It's all very soothing white noise, but it's not enough.

He can tell Eddie's not asleep either by the way he keeps rustling around too. So, Richie slides a little closer.

"I'm so cold," he whines in a whisper.

"Go to sleep," Eddie mumbles, not opening his eyes.

"I can't!"

"Try."

"I did but I can't! If only I had a small, cute boy to hold me!"

That gets his attention. His eyes open, annoyed. "I'm not small!"

Richie keeps milking it. "—Someone to keep me warm through this

long and lonely night!”

“Oh my god.”

Richie pretends to shiver, pouting all pathetically. “So cold! So alone!”

“Keep your voice down!” Eddie whispers. He glances over at his friends’ sleeping frames before he mutters under his breath and slides closer to Richie. Richie rolls onto his side with his back to Eddie and lets Eddie spoon him. Eddie’s hands — smaller and softer than Richie’s — wrap around Richie’s stomach.

“If anyone asks, we fell asleep and accidentally woke up like this,” Eddie instructs.

Richie just closes his eyes and nods, perfectly content to just snuggle into Eddie’s arms.

Eddie presses a chaste kiss to the back of Richie’s neck and snuggles against him. It’s probably meant to be soothing, but it sets Richie off like a trigger.

So like, maybe he doesn’t want to go to sleep just quite yet.

He rolls over — still in Eddie’s arms — to face him, smiling mischievously.

“Richie?” Eddie’s whispers.

Richie pulls the covers over their heads, hiding them from everyone else, and locks lips with Eddie.

Eddie pulls back, flustered. “Jesus, Rich, were you even fucking cold?”

Richie smiles innocently. “Freezing!”

“Yeah, right.” Eddie rolls his eyes, but starts kissing him back anyway. He tastes like toothpaste and still smells faintly of chlorine. It’s a weird combination, but Richie doesn’t mind one bit.

Their kisses start off slow and sleepy, but steadily grow heavier and french-ier. It’s hot under the covers — increasingly so as Richie and Eddie really get into it — but that’s easy to overlook when they’re pressed together like this. Richie’s pretty sure he forgets his own name when they’re like this.

“Fuck, Eds,” Richie whispers, pulling back to suck on Eddie’s lower lip. “Wan’ you so much,”

Eddie hums in response as his hands roam Richie’s back. “I want your mom,” he whispers back teasingly.

Richie breaks. He crumples against Eddie, stifling his laughter against Eddie's mouth. "Fuck off, dude! I'm trying to set a mood!"

Eddie ducks his head and quiets his giggles against Richie's neck. "I know, I'm sorry!"

Richie kisses his forehead. "I thought that out of the two of us, I was supposed to be the dick."

"You must be corrupting me."

"Hot."

"Shut up," Eddie smiles, going in for another kiss.

It doesn't last long though, because less than 10 seconds later, someone's knocking on the door.

"Shit!" Eddie whispers.

"What the fuck?" Richie frowns. They both shove the sheets back down to normal and glance toward the door.

The knocking continues, quiet but persistent.

“It’s probably just some homeless person,” Richie whispers.

“Yeah, with a meat hook for a hand!” Eddie hisses, “Or a serial killer! Or both!”

“What?!”

“You’ve seen movies before! The minute teenagers have sex, they get murdered like in Friday the 13th! Like that one guy, *through* the bed! And they never caught the Zodiac killer! He killed people our age all the time!”

“You really think we were just having sex?” Richie snorts, “Are you 12?”

“Shut the fuck up!” Eddie whispers angrily.

“I hope it’s the Zodiac killer,” Richie whispers, “I’d kick his ass, then rake in that sweet reward money.”

“No, you wouldn’t!”

“I killed a clown!”

“Just stop talking!”

“Ben?” A voice calls out, once, then once more.

“It’s Bev, you idiot,” Richie whispers without malice.

“I’m never kissing you again,” Eddie whispers bitterly.

“What’d I do?”

“Your face!” Eddie says nonsensically.

“Nice one, Eds!” Richie snickers.

Bev calls out Ben’s name a few more times, and Ben starts to stir from where he’s tucked inside his sleeping bag on the floor. Richie and Eddie glance at each other in alarm before lying back on the pillows, closing their eyes, and doing their best to pretend to be asleep.

Ben yawns and gets up, quietly walking to the door. “Beverly?” He whispers as he opens the door.

“Hey,” she whispers back.

Richie's holding his breath, straining to hear. He feels like he can hear his heartbeat directly in his ears.

"What's wrong?" Ben asks.

"I can't sleep. I...I just—"

"Nightmares?"

"Yeah. Would you..." She pauses, and she almost sounds shy, something Richie rarely sees from Bev, "Could you stay with me? You can have the extra bed; I just don't wanna be alone right now."

"Of course!"

The door shuts behind them, and moments later, Richie can hear the sound of Beverly's door opening and closing again.

Richie checks to make sure that the rest of their friends are still sleeping before breathing out. "Holy shit!"

"That scared the shit out of me," Eddie whispers, stating the obvious.

Richie turns to smirk at him. "Looks like I won't be the only one getting lucky tonight, huh?"

Eddie hits him upside the head. "Dream on, dumbass!"

"Oh, believe me, Eds, *I will.*"

"I'm still mad at you," Eddie scowls. "I'll go sleep in Ben's sleeping bag."

Richie lets out a low whine and pulls Eddie close. "No! Don't leave. I'll miss you!"

"That makes one of us."

"You're such a shit liar, Eds," Richie smiles. He toys with the top button of Eddie's shirt, "You're not mad at me."

"Excuse me?"

"You're just mad 'cause you pussied out."

"I'm not! I didn't!"

"I'm fluent in Spaghetti," Richie brags, "I told you, Eds, I know your moves."

Eddie keeps glancing down at the button Richie's playing with, like he's debating whether or not to tell him to stop. "You don't know shit, even Stan said so."

"Well, Stan thinks birds are cool, so all of his opinions are invalid."

"Birds can be cool."

"Yeah, right. Name one!"

"Hawks."

"Name two."

Eddie gently pulls Richie's hands off of the button. "Rich, it's like, 1 AM. I'm not staying up to argue about fucking birds. Can we go to sleep?"

"Depends," Richie says. He slides closer to Eddie so that their noses are brushing. "You still mad at me?"

"Ugh," Eddie rolls his eyes all disgusted, "Obviously." He's so pretty up close, all big brown eyes and soft lashes and light freckles.

Richie smiles and wraps his arms around Eddie's waist. "That's too bad," he whispers in his 'seductive' voice. He's not sure if it's really effective or not, he hasn't exactly got loads of experience using it, but he just tries to make his voice go lower and a little rougher.

Eddie's eyes flit down to Richie's mouth, and that's when Richie knows he's winning. Maybe his seductive voice isn't as goofy as it feels.

Eddie raises his gaze, and Richie gives Eddie a knowing smile.

"You're so obnoxious," Eddie mumbles tiredly.

"You're so beautiful, Eds," Richie whispers back.

Eddie, naturally, blushes all happily from the compliment. It's almost too easy, how often he's able to get Eddie to do that. "I guess you're ok," Eddie says, giving Richie a cheeky grin.

"Please, Eds, you think I'm hot."

Eddie snorts, but he's still blushing. "Maybe a little."

Which is Eddie speak for 'YES!'

Richie raises his hands to cup Eddie's cheeks. His lips hover over Eddie's, close enough to feel each other's breath but not to touch.

Eddie's eyes flutter closed as he leans in. So much for never kissing him again.

Richie smirks. *Check and mate*. He wants so badly to call out Eddie for being a huge sappy hypocrite, but he knows doing so will only lead to more bickering, and he is kinda tired. There's only so much *tumultuousness* that he can handle in one night.

So, he swallows his snark and gives his boyfriend a sweet and comforting kiss. Eddie smiles into it, and Richie wonders if it's possible for two people to be happier than they are.

He pulls back to smile at Eddie and decides that no, there is no one else. Fuck all the love songs and romances on TV, he loves Eddie more than anyone has ever loved anything.

Eddie brushes Richie's hair out of his face and kisses his temple.

"Hold me again?" Richie whispers, not even caring how lame he sounds.

Eddie smiles and nods. Richie rolls over, and then Eddie's spooning him like before.

“Goodnight,” Eddie whispers, nuzzling his face into Richie’s back.

“Goodnight, Eddie,” Richie mumbles back, and with the feel of Eddie’s heartbeat against his back and the feeling of him safe in his arms, he falls asleep quickly and blissfully.

Notes for the Chapter:

Soft boys! They're so in love!

4. Chapter 4

Notes for the Chapter:

this fic is literally like fast food ... no substance, all diabetes
if you've made it this far along tho i feel like you
been knew that

“Well, well, well!” Richie smirks as he approaches Ben, “Where were you last night, Hanscom?”

It's the next morning and they're all getting breakfast. The hotel has a dining area off of the main lobby. There's a little banquet table set up with basic fixings, but Richie's ignoring it right now for Ben.

He just has to know what the hell happened last night.

Ben's seated at one of the dining tables as Richie approaches, his face red. “Beverly invited me to her room.”

Richie sits across from him and wolf-whistles obnoxiously.

Ben blushes even harder as he takes a bite of his muffin. “It wasn't like that,” he defends, “She was just scared.”

“I'm sure you made her feel real safe, huh?” Richie winks. He knows nothing probably happened, but he loves yanking Ben's chain. He doesn't get as mad as Eddie, but it's still amusing to see him get all

shy and bashful about everything.

“We just talked,” Ben says, and he almost sounds wistful, “I slept on the other bed and we just talked until we fell asleep.”

“What’d you talk about?” Richie asks, genuinely curious.

“Stuff.”

“Hmm. Fine, keep your secrets, then!”

“It’s not secrets,” Ben hesitates, “I just...it was personal stuff. I don’t know if Bev would want me to say.”

“No worries, Ben!” Richie shrugs, “I’m just fuckin’ with you! I don’t need to know everything that went down in your lil love shack last night.”

Ben looks so flustered, he’s just about overwhelmed from it. “Just talking.”

“Uh-huh,” Richie winks.

They’re interrupted by Eddie joining them at their table. He’s carrying two plates of food, one of which he hands to Richie.

“I made you a waffle,” Eddie says, giving Richie a smile. It’s the same smile he gave him when they woke up this morning (not still cuddling, sadly, they both move too much in their sleep). He sits down next to Richie, knocking their feet together under the table all affectionately.

Richie smiles back as he takes the plate. “Thanks, babe.”

Ben eyes them. “Babe?” He echoes, sounding confused and almost like he wants to laugh.

Richie smiles nervously. “Uh, yeah? Babe, like...*baby*. Like Eddie’s a lil bitch for making me breakfast.”

“I think he was just trying to be nice.”

“Well,” Richie says, and he means to follow it up with something, but in a rare occurrence, he draws a blank and the word just hangs there, stupidly and embarrassingly unfinished.

Eddie snorts as he digs into his own breakfast; a syrupy waffle and some fruit salad. Richie makes a mental note to kiss him soon, while he still tastes sweet.

The rest of the Losers join them at the table one-by-one until they’re finally all eating together.

“So, how’d everyone sleep?” Bill asks.

“I dunno,” Richie muses, turning toward Bev, “How *did* we sleep, Bev?” He knows he’s being kind of obnoxious, BUT, in his defense, it’s not like Bev hasn’t been doing the same stunts with him and Eddie lately. It’s time to see if she can keep up with her own game.

Beverly takes a sip of her orange juice as she stares Richie down. “Comfortably. How’d you sleep?”

“Happily.”

“Well, our bed was pretty stiff,” Stan says, oblivious to what’s going on between Bev and Richie.

“Ew, gross!” Richie exclaims, “None of us need to know how stiff you were last night, Stanley!”

Stan kicks him under the table.

“Just think,” Mike says excitedly, “In 12 hours, we’ll be in Florida!”

“I can’t wait for it to be warm,” Ben says.

“Kids that live in Florida don’t know how lucky they are,” Richie sighs, “It’s basically summer break all year round!”

“Yeah, but there’s also hurricanes,” Eddie points out, “In the summer and fall.”

“And alligators,” Stan adds.

Eddie eyes him anxiously. “Alligators?”

Stan nods gravely. “I saw a special about them in *National Geographic*. Apparently, there’s over a million in Florida, they have 80 teeth, and they can be up to 14 feet long!”

“Sweet!” Richie grins, “Aren’t they related to dinosaurs or some shit?”

“I think so.”

“Oh no,” Eddie says, shaking his head, “Nope.”

“Cheer up, Eds!” Richie says, rubbing Eddie’s thigh under the table reassuringly, “Seeing an alligator would be cool! Like *Jurassic Park*!”

“What, the movie where dinosaurs ate everyone?”

“Fine then — like *The Land Before Time!*”

Bev smiles at Richie. “You’ve watched *The Land Before Time?*”

“No!” Richie feels his face start to burn.

“Isn’t that a kids’ movie?” Stan smirks.

“Your face is a kids’ movie, Stan!”

“I doubt we’ll see any alligators anyway,” Bill cuts in, “We’re going to be by the ocean. Alligators don’t go in the oceans.”

“That’s true,” Eddie agrees, looking relieved. He lovingly pats the hand Richie has on his thigh before gently pushing it away.

“Well, let’s finish up breakfast,” Bev says encouragingly, “The sooner we leave, the sooner we’ll get there.”

“Well, I’m done,” Eddie announces, standing up with his empty plate, “I’m going to pack up.”

Bill hands him the room key. “Okay. I’ll be up in a minute.”

Richie glances up at Eddie before shoving the rest of his waffle down in one bite. "I'm done too," he says with his mouth full.

The Losers give him weird looks, but thankfully none of them say anything as Richie and Eddie take their paper plates, throw them away, and head back to their room.

Richie and Eddie barely make it inside before Richie presses Eddie up against the door and kisses him. His tongue moves in eagerly, chasing the taste of maple syrup and strawberries.

Eddie sighs happily against Richie's mouth, but pulls away after a minute. "They'll be done eating soon," he reminds Richie.

"Yeah, yeah," Richie pouts, but steps back.

Eddie starts packing up his things and stripping the bed again. Richie helps him out, gathering up his toiletries and neatly arranging them in Eddie's bag.

"Thanks for making me breakfast," Richie says, glancing at Eddie as he carefully folds up his sheets.

Eddie shrugs. "It's no big deal."

“It was nice,” Richie insists. Really, everything about this morning was *nice*. Waking up next to Eddie in bed, his snores soft and his hair messy, was something that Richie wanted to happen every morning forever.

“Thanks,” Eddie replies, slightly bashful. His brow furrows though, and he frowns, “Except—“

Richie pauses. “Except what?”

“*Babe?*” Eddie says with that patented Kaspbrak-blend of indignation and accusation.

“Yeah?”

“You called me *babe*! Is this fucking *Grease*?”

“I need a pet name for you,” Richie smiles with a shrug.

“A—you—a fuckin—“ Eddie sputters, “All you ever do is call me pet names!”

“No, those are *nicknames*,” Richie says, crossing the room to stand next to Eddie, “I need a proper pet name for the love of my life, Eds, I’m tired of the old ones.”

“YOU'RE tired of them?” Eddie nearly laughs.

“Uh-huh,” Richie pauses to think, “...*Sweetheart.*”

“No.”

“What about ‘sugar?’”

“No.”

“Short stack?”

“I’m not short, asshole!”

“Pumpkin.”

“What? No.”

“But we started dating on Halloween! It’d be sentimental and shit.”

“Still nope.”

“Fine...uh...honey bunny!”

“Why a bunny?”

Richie winks at him and raises his hand for a high-five, “‘Cause we go at it like rabbits, am I right?”

Eddie smacks his hand down. “No!”

Richie pouts.

“I don’t know why you’re trying to come up with something anyway,” Eddie frowns, “We’re supposed to be a secret, remember? How are we going to hide the fact that we’re together if you go around calling me *babe*?”

“So, you *do* like ‘babe’!” Richie grins.

“What?! Do you understand English? Like did you actually ever pass elementary school?!”

“It was the one you mentioned specifically,” Richie muses, “So it’s on your mind. According to Spaghetti-ese, that means you like it.”

“Spaghetti-ese?”

“Eddie speak! Like Portuguese!”

Eddie bites his lip like he’s trying not to laugh. “Richie,” he says, fighting to keep his voice even, “You are literally the biggest dumbass alive.”

“Meaning, *you are literally the funniest person alive, Richie,*” Richie smirks. He pokes Eddie’s cheek a few times. “I can literally see you laughing, hot stuff.”

“I’m not laughing!” Eddie laughs, “You’re not funny!”

Their moment ends when there’s a knock on the door, followed by Bill politely asking to be let in. Richie kisses Eddie’s cheek one last time before going over to the door to let the rest of the guys in.

They pack up their things and load up the car. The morning air is crisp and fresh, and Richie takes every advantage to stretch his limbs while he still can. Ben has his camera out again, filming them as the sun comes up and they all wave goodbye to the hotel.

As they pile back into the van, he can’t help but think about how weird traveling is. Like, he’s made so many memories in this place that he’ll probably never return to again. It’s like he’s leaving a part of himself here in the middle of Virginia, completely vulnerable to just fade away with time.

Eddie feels restless as the drive drags on. Even though Richie lets him borrow his Game Boy again, he can only play video games for so long before his brain starts to flatline.

Speaking of flatlining, he realizes much too late in the day that he's a dead man.

They're at a truck stop near the border of North and South Carolina, stocking up on candy and coffee, when Eddie has a heart attack. He freezes in place in the middle of the aisle he's standing in, hands tightly clutching the bag of trail mix he was going to buy.

"Yo, Eds," Richie says, walking up to him, "Twinkies or Swiss Rolls?" He holds up both indecisively.

Eddie starts hyperventilating. "I...uh..."

Richie pales. "Eddie?"

Bill sees the commotion and walks over to them. "You ok, Eddie?"

Eddie shakes his head frantically. "I forgot to call my mom!" He exclaims, "I told her I'd call her when we got to the hotel last night!" Even just saying the words fill him with a drowning amount of dread. His mom will be furious with him. She'll kill him. Or she'll drive down to Florida and pick him up to bring him back to Maine and THEN kill him. Or at least, she'll never let him leave the house ever again. He can kiss college goodbye.

"So what?" Richie says, unable to hide the resentment in his voice. For all the jokes he's made about fucking her, it's no secret that Richie hates how Eddie's mom treats him. And yeah, Eddie hates it too, but he sometimes wishes that Richie better understood that Eddie still cares about her.

"So, she's probably freaking out!" Eddie frets, "Fuck!"

"There's a payphone outside," Stan says. Where did he come from?! What the fuck?!

"Here," Bill says quickly. He digs into his pocket and pulls out a handful of change.

"Thanks!" Eddie exclaims. He drops his bag of trail mix and runs outside. Sure enough, there's a bright blue payphone stand around the side of the building. It's right beside the tree line, away from the hustle and bustle of cars and trucks coming and going. It has a weathered phone book tucked inside a cubby beneath it, its pages faded and water-puckered. Eddie doesn't even have time to consider how many germs are on this thing before he's inserting the coins and dialing his mom's number.

As the phone rings, he's not sure whether he wants it to pick up or go to voicemail.

She answers. "*Hello?*" She says, sounding like she's just been crying.

Eddie swallows. "Hey, Mommy."

And she explodes.

Eddie feels like he spends hours just standing there, listening to her go off on him. After a while, her worries and shouts just turn into a jabbing white noise, one that leaves his head feeling painfully numb.

Had me worried sick —

Just about called the national guard —

Do you even CARE about me —

After everything I've done for you, Eddie —

I should've known I couldn't trust those nasty friends of yours —

Eddie clutches the receiver tighter. “I’m sorry, okay, Mommy?” He eventually says, “But I’m fine, really. Bill’s doing a good job at being in charge.”

“Isn’t that the same boy who let his brother get killed?” His mother snaps.

And suddenly the world is very quiet.

Eddie has a flash of Bill, kneeling down in the Derry sewers, clutching a muddied and bloodied raincoat. There’s no context to the memory at first, until it flashes in his mind like a neon light.

The clown. That summer. Bill, broken indefinitely.

He knows his mother’s crossed a line. Like, a big huge one, etched in blood.

“I’m going now,” Eddie snaps coldly.

“Eddie! Don’t you dare hang up on me—“

He hangs up the phone.

His whole body is shaking, and he’s breathless. He hunches over,

hands on his knees, to catch his breath, and when he finally comes to again, he sees that Richie's leaning against the side of the building, watching him.

He looks...annoyed. It takes Eddie a second to recognize it, but he is. His eyes are all narrowed and his body is tense.

"What?" Eddie asks.

"I don't know why you even bothered to call her," Richie mutters.

"Because I told her I would!"

"She doesn't deserve you, Eds!"

"Deserve me?! She's my mom!"

"She treats you like shit!"

"Yeah, but she's still—"

"No buts!" Richie snaps, "She doesn't get to treat you like shit while you just take it! It's fucked up."

“So, what am I supposed to do? Just ignore her?”

“Yes!”

“Where the fuck is this coming from?” Eddie frowns, crossing his arms over his chest.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, all you ever do is make jokes about my mom, and now you’re randomly getting mad at me for not taking her seriously?”

“I’m not mad at you!”

“Then why are you shouting at me?”

“I’m not shouting!” Richie says loudly, before wincing and taking a step back, “I’m not shouting, and I’m not mad at you,” he says in a lower voice, “I just...I hate seeing you get all worked up over her, is all. It’s not fair.”

Eddie glances down at his feet, shuffles in place.

“And I heard what she said about Bill.”

Shit. Had she really been that loud?

“That was a fucked-up thing to say. Like, even more fucked-up than the normal shit she says.”

Eddie nods. “It was.” He suddenly glances up at Richie, eyes wide and anxious. “You’re not going to tell him, right?”

“Fuck, no!”

“Okay, good,” Eddie sighs, “I’m pretty sure he’d never want to see me again if he found out.”

“No, Bill wouldn’t do that,” Richie dismisses.

Eddie hesitates, but glances up at Richie. “What about you?”

“What about me?”

“I mean, I know you said I should ignore her, but, she’s still my mom, I can’t just...get rid of her or some shit. And if we stayed together, she’d be like your mother-in-law basically, and I wouldn’t want you to give up on me because of her.”

Richie raises his eyebrows. "My mother-in-law? You planning that far ahead, Eds?"

Shit!

"No!" He says quickly, body engulfed in flames, "I just meant like theoretically! Besides, she never could be anyway, guys can't get married anywhere, I looked it up."

Richie smiles. "You looked it up?"

Fuck Eddie, honestly. Fuck his dumb mouth for not knowing when to not make a fool of himself. "No! I just saw it on TV! By accident!"

"You can't lie," Richie smiles, stepping closer, "You can't lie for shit!"

Eddie buries his face in his hands. Richie probably thinks he's a total weirdo now. What high schooler starts thinking about marriage and shit after being with someone for two years? It was probably super creepy and clingy-sounding. Ugh.

Richie gently moves Eddie's hands away from his face so he can hold them. "I'm not giving up on you," he reassures him, "Not now or ever."

Eddie still can't make eye contact with him, but he nods and leans into him.

Richie smirks before leaning into Eddie's ear and whispering teasingly, "Eddie *Tozier*."

Eddie's surprised he hasn't combusted yet, his body feels so hot. "Shut up!" He exclaims, shoving Richie away.

Richie just starts laughing like an idiot. "You're so cute, Eds!" he teases, pinching Eddie's cheek.

Eddie swats him away, still blushing hard. He hates that he doesn't hate the sound of *Eddie Tozier*. "I'd never take your last name in a million years!" He insists, "I wouldn't want anyone to think I'm related to the dumbest person alive!"

Richie gets down on one knee, right there in the grass amongst all the beer bottles and old cigarette butts. "Oh, Eddie!" He proclaims dramatically, "*Babe*, will you please do me the honor of becoming Mrs. Big Dick Tozier?"

"I will castrate you."

"Hot. Want me to get a Ring Pop and make it official?"

"Fuck off," Eddie mumbles, glancing away so Richie hopefully won't see him smiling.

“Aw, Eds.” Richie stands up and pulls Eddie into a hug. His hand cups the back of Eddie’s hand as he gives him a loving pat on the back. It’s somewhat unexpected, but not unwanted.

“Everyone’s getting back into the car,” Richie says as he pulls away, “You ready?”

Eddie nods. He’s almost forgotten how upset he was a minute later. Richie has an incredible talent for making that happen. He walks with Richie back to the van, wishing he could hold his hand.

“Is your mom okay?” Bill asks as Richie and Eddie get into their seats.

Eddie can’t help but feel guilty about what his mom said, but he nods. A part of him hates his mother for that — it’s one thing for her to constantly harass Eddie, but he hated when she talked shit about his friends, especially Bill, who probably had things the hardest out of all of them.

“She’s fine,” Eddie says, buckling himself in, “She’s just being...”

Annoying. Suffocating. Paranoid.

“A bitch,” Eddie says before he can stop himself. His eyes widen as the words leave his mouth. He’s never called her that before. He’s never felt rebellious or bold enough to do so, but now the word is out there, and he’d be lying if he said that he regretted it.

Richie whistles, looking impressed, as the other Losers exchanged surprised glances.

“I mean,” Stan mutters from the passengers’ seat, “He’s not wrong.”

And then they’re back on the road. Long drives, long roads, long traffic jams. The further south they drive, the warmer the air gets. It’s like a beacon beckoning them closer, guiding them along their journey.

A North Carolina morning, a South Carolina afternoon, and a Georgia evening, and then finally —

“FLORIDA!” Mike says as they see the sign announcing the state line. The car nearly explodes as everyone loses their shit.

They’ve still got a couple of hours to go until they reach the beach house, but once they’re finally in the state, it’s like that doesn’t even matter anymore.

Eddie cranes his neck to watch everything as they drive by. There are so many palm trees, and they’re so tall. He never thought he’d see one in real life. Stan is convinced that he sees an alligator by the side of the road, but Bev insists that it was just a log.

It's around 10:00 when they finally pull up into a small rental community. There's an office building that guards the entrance. *Building* may be an overstatement though: it's more like a slightly impressive shack with weathered navy blue paint and a thatched roof.

Bill talks to the property manager inside, gets the keys, and then they're driving past the main gates.

"I can't believe we're finally here!" Mike keeps saying in awe.

"Spring break!" Richie shouts for what has to be the 10th time in the past two hours.

They drive down a meandering street that follows the coastline. They pass other beach houses before they finally get to theirs; a small, sky-blue, one-story house with white trim and a raised deck.

The Losers bolt out of the car as soon as Bill parks in the brick-paved driveway. They sprint around the back of the house and down the sprawling sandy hill behind it.

Eddie's running faster than he thinks he ever even has in track practice. The wind is whipping through his hair and the sand is kicking up behind him in thick bursts.

And then it's right there: the ocean. It sprawls out before them, dark and black and infinite. The stars reflect in the water, and in the distance, the trailing coastline glimmers with far-off lights. The air smells of salt and sand and euphoria.

They wind up yelling at the waves and dancing along the shore like a bunch of crazy people. Excitement pulsates through the night, and Eddie's never felt more young and free and *alive*.

After they get the excited jitters out of their system, they hurry back to the car to get their suitcases and check out the house. There are four bedrooms — three for the boys to divide amongst themselves, one for Bev — and the second Bill unlocks the front door, it's a battle royale to find the best room.

Richie and Stan wind up stuck in the doorway of the biggest bedroom in the house, each struggling to push the other out of the way.

"I—was—here—first!" Stan exclaims.

"No, you weren't!"

"Yes, I was!"

Bill and Eddie exchange wary glances, neither really interested in getting in the middle of this.

In the end though, Stan steps on Richie's foot, causing Richie to fall back in pain.

"Motherfucker!" Richie yelps, holding his foot.

"That's karma, Richie!" Stan says, blocking the doorway from him.

"For what?!"

"Assaulting me!"

"Stan, you idiot! I'm gonna stick your hand in a bowl of warm water tonight and make you piss yourself!"

"I'll lock the door!"

"I'll climb in through the window!"

"I'll push you out!"

"You'll be asleep!"

"I'll wake up!"

“No, you won’t!”

“Yes, I will!”

“Boys!” Beverly sighs, sticking her head out of her bedroom door,
“Stop!”

“Before we leave you to sleep outside with the alligators,” Mike jokes from inside his room.

Richie and Stan exchange wary glances until Richie smirks at him.
“Here’s to hoping alligators eat kosher then, huh, Stanley?”

Stan just shakes his head, lamenting his own existence under his breath as he retreats to his room.

Eddie walks over to Richie and tugs on his sleeve. “C’mon, Rich, I got us our room. Does your foot actually hurt?”

“Not really,” Richie admits.

Eddie rolls his eyes and pulls him along. “You’re so dramatic.”

Now that the dust has settled, Eddie has time to appreciate where they'll be living for the next week. It has a lot of big bay windows that overlook the ocean, and comfy-looking coastal-colored furniture. There's all this art of seahorses and ships and shells all over the place, and the polished wooden floor creaks comfortingly as he brings Richie to the room he picked out for them.

It's not as big as the one Richie had his sight set on, but it's cozy. It has a little fireplace and a full-sized bed that's covered with a colorful quilt. There's a nightstand beside the bed with a small lamp that brightens the room conservatively. While Richie was sticking it out with Stan, Eddie already went through the liberty of wheeling their suitcases in and changing the sheets.

"I guess Stan can keep his room," Richie says, like it's still up for debate or something, "This one's nice."

"We have our own bathroom," Eddie points out. He takes Richie's hand and leads him to it.

"Sweet," Richie smiles, glancing inside.

They turn back to the bedroom. Richie closes the door, ensuring their privacy from everyone else. It's such a simple action, and yet it causes a shiver to run down Eddie's back.

Richie kicks off his shoes and places them by the door next to Eddie's. "I can't believe we're actually here," he says, stretching out his limbs. The action causes his shirt to ride up, and Eddie tries not to stare. *God, what is up with him?* He's so on edge — he blames being

trapped in a car for 12 hours.

“I feel like this week is going to be amazing,” Richie continues. His arms drop and his shirt falls back into place.

“It’s so different from Derry,” Eddie agrees. He goes to stand by the sliding glass doors that lead out to the beach, peeking past the flowy white curtains that obstruct them from view.

Richie comes to stand behind him. He wraps his arms around Eddie’s waist and rests his chin on Eddie’s head. “Good,” he says simply.

Eddie nods as they watch the ocean rush in and out. “Good.”

Richie nuzzles his face into Eddie’s shoulder. “Whaddya wanna do tomorrow?”

“I dunno, I guess whatever everyone else wants to do.”

“Hmmm...and after that?”

“Uh, go swimming?”

“And after that?”

“Lunch?”

“And after *that*?”

Who knows what could happen?

Eddie moves away from the window to go stand by the fireplace (why the fuck is there even a fireplace in here anyway? who the hell lights a fire in a beach house?). “Listen!” He says firmly.

Richie stands up straighter, very much listening. “Uh, ok.”

“Just so we’re clear,” Eddie says, holding up his hand for emphasis, “I want to get actual sleep in this room! This isn’t gonna turn into some crazy sex dungeon or something!”

Richie bursts out laughing, which obviously makes Eddie annoyed.

“I’m serious!” Eddie insists.

“Okay,” Richie swallows his laughter, but his eyes are still shining and he’s still shaking a little. “I promise I won’t turn our bedroom into a sex dungeon, whatever the fuck that means.”

“Good,” Eddie says, hoping in vain that he sounds stern and not flustered.

Richie pauses for a moment before he slowly walks over. He sits down on the edge of the bed and looks up at Eddie more seriously. “Honestly, though, Eds,” he hesitates, “Do you really not want to do *anything*?”

Eddie blushes and looks down at his feet.

“Because I’d be fine with that!” Richie says, “Really! I don’t want you to be uncomfortable around me, or anything.”

“I want to do *some* things,” Eddie admits shyly, “But just not constantly, or—” *Why is it so hard to talk?* “Like, too much too soon. Ugh, I dunno.”

“No worries, babe,” Richie stands. He gives Eddie a soft kiss on his cheek, “It’s really fine. We can take it slow.”

Eddie’s so glad Richie’s so patient with him. In the movies and TV shows he sees about high schoolers, the boyfriends always get so annoyed when their girlfriends won’t go all the way with them. They whine and complain and it’s always kinda dumb. But Richie’s never been like that — he’s never tried to push Eddie into anything, and he’s never been mad when Eddie backs out of something. Eddie completely adores him for it.

“Is it cool if I at least touch you?” Richie says, poking Eddie’s stomach.

Eddie flinches and smiles. “Not like that.”

Richie pokes his nose. “What, like that?”

“Stop!” Eddie giggles.

Richie pokes his cheeks, his sides, his arms. “Like that?” He keeps saying teasingly.

Eddie tries to grab his hand, but they just wind up laughing and tussling in place. Their hands lock, so Eddie pushes him back on the bed and crawls on top of him.

“Like this, dipshit!” He says before tickling Richie relentlessly.

Richie laughs loudly as he squirms under Eddie’s fingers. It’s a beautiful sound to Eddie, knowing that Richie’s so brilliantly happy, and that it’s because of him. He’s a cacophony of moving limbs and bursting laughter as he writhes beneath Eddie’s fingers.

“Eddie!” He keeps laughing, so hard his glasses are sliding askew, “Fuck!”

They eventually stop to catch their breath and look at each other, both panting and starry-eyed. Eddie places his hand over Richie's heart to feel how fast it's racing.

The mood starts to shift.

Richie blinks up at him. He's got better glasses these days. Last year, he finally ditched the coke-bottle glasses for actual normal ones, and Eddie was both thrilled and anxious because his boyfriend was suddenly a lot more attractive because of it.

Richie's t-shirt has ridden up again, giving Eddie an up-close and generous view of the pale skin of his stomach. Richie has a few chest hairs that he's so proud of, and a few darker ones above the waistband of his pants (Eddie barely has any facial hair, let alone body hair yet; it's totally un-fucking-fair. He knows it'll come in eventually, but he hates feeling behind).

His gaze moves up to Richie's face again — his brown eyes, soft freckles, flushed cheeks, and smiling lips.

“Whatcha thinking about?” Richie whispers affectionately. He raises a hand to tuck a strand of Eddie's hair behind his ear.

Eddie grabs Richie's hand before it leaves and starts kissing his knuckles. “Last night, in the hotel.”

Richie watches his mouth attentively. “Oh.”

“You said I thought you were hot,” Eddie continues.

“Yeah, and?”

“I don’t.”

“Jeez, thanks.”

“You’re not hot,” Eddie says. *Hot* feels so inadequate somehow. It feels like a younger Richie when he talked about Phoebe Cates’ tits (or was it Kelly Preston’s?) — artificial and exaggerated.

He’s not hot — Richie Tozier is *beautiful*. But saying so sounds so sappy, Eddie doesn’t think he can physically get the words out.

“You’re perfect,” he mumbles instead.

Richie glances down, looking shy. It’s an unusual reaction from him, and it makes him look a lot softer than usual. “Oh.”

Eddie leans down and kisses his nose. “I mean it.”

Richie smiles up at him, still looking quite flustered. He’s probably

not used to affection from Eddie that's not layered in playful sarcasm.
"Hey, Eds?"

"Yeah?"

"I'm gonna kiss you now, if that's cool."

Eddie smiles back. "Cool."

"Cool," Richie echoes, and when their lips meet, neither of them can stop smiling.

Eddie tangles his fingers in Richie's hair and kisses him happily. He can hear the distant sounds of waves crashing against the shore; it's like a heartbeat of its own, steady and reassuring.

Richie, never breaking the kiss, gently flips them over so that Eddie's on his back. His hands palm Eddie's hips and thighs, igniting a spark deep in Eddie's gut.

"*Richie*—" Eddie whispers, breaking their kiss to arch into him.

"Yeah?" Richie whispers back.

Eddie just shakes his head. There aren't any other words.

Richie pushes Eddie's hair back and rubs his thumb over Eddie's cheek. Eddie watches him reverently — even though he knows he probably looks like a sappy dork.

His head lowers as he starts kissing Eddie's neck. Then he pushes Eddie's shirt up and he's kissing his chest, stomach, and hips.

He stops below there, his head between Eddie's thighs, hand palming where he wants to be. "Is this okay?"

And his voice is so soft and gentle and full of concern, how could it *not* be?

Eddie smiles shyly. "Fuck yeah."

"Not too sex-dungeony for you?" He smirks.

Eddie gently nudges Richie's head with his foot. "Stoppp!" He smiles.

"Oh, I can stop!" Richie teases, pulling back.

"Richie!" Eddie whines impatiently.

“Eddie!” Richie echoes.

Eddie tries his best not to laugh as he pouts up at Richie. It’s so hard to keep a straight face with him sometimes (a lot of times), especially when Richie starts smiling that beautiful, unabashed, million-watt smile of his.

“You’re the worst,” Eddie huffs.

“Which means I’m the best,” Richie translates.

And then he’s ducking his head again, and Eddie doesn’t even try to pretend that he’s wrong.

Notes for the Chapter:

you didn't hear this from me but honestly the losers probably should've prioritized getting a room that doesn't share a wall with reddie over getting the biggest one ☐

thank you for reading this chapter! 1 comment = 1 completed Rosseta Stone course in Spaghettiese.

5. Chapter 5

Notes for the Chapter:

So, I literally googled 'Florida Beach House Rentals' ONCE to get a feel for what they looked like, and now I'm getting YouTube ads for beach house rentals

like bitch??? i'm broke?

Also i put up my christmas tree today while this fic is about spring break what even

When Richie wakes up the next morning, he's under the covers and Eddie's snuggled beside him, already awake. Sunlight fills the room, leaving the atmosphere warm and welcoming. He's still in his boxers from last night, not bothering to have changed into pajamas like Eddie had.

"Hey," Eddie whispers, smiling up at Richie. He has his arms wrapped around Richie's chest and their legs are intertwined.

"Hey," Richie whispers back.

"Did you sleep well?"

"Very," Richie studies him for a moment before adding, "So, like, what kind of dungeon are we dealing with here, Eds? Like are we on some dark *Dragon's Lair* shit? Or is it more like a *Super Mario* acid trip?"

Eddie groans and buries his face in Richie's neck. "Shut up!"

"Or like *Dungeons and Dragons*?" Richie continues impishly, "Maybe you wanna role play!"

"Stop!"

"Too bad I didn't pack any handcuffs, huh? It would've really added to the dungeon-y atmosphere."

"You're never going to let that go, huh?" Eddie sighs, pulling back to pout at him.

"Nope," Richie grins. "Literally never, you li'l weirdo."

"I didn't mean to say dungeon," Eddie kicks him lazily. "I just meant I don't want to hook up all the time while we're here!"

Richie just smiles. "Alright, Eds."

He wonders how long they have until Mrs. Kaspbrak knocks on the door and tells Eddie that breakfast is ready, cueing Richie to sneak out Eddie's bedroom window.

But then he remembers that they're not at Eddie's — they're in

Florida — and if anyone tries to disturb them, he has the power to tell them to fuck off (nicely, though).

So, he can give Eddie all the good-morning kisses he wants.

Eddie giggles as Richie rolls on top of him and starts peppering him with enthusiastic kisses. “Richie!”

Richie kisses Eddie’s nose, forehead, cheeks, ear, temples, chin. “Last night was nice,” he says in between kissing Eddie’s neck and kissing Eddie’s shoulder.

Eddie smiles. The early morning light makes his dark hair glow amber at the edges. “Yeah.”

Once he’s got enough kisses in, Richie stops. He smiles down at Eddie contently, gaze tracing that amber glow.

“You were good,” Eddie smiles shyly.

“Aka, *thanks for rocking my world last night, Richie, who I’m in love with!*” Richie translates with a wink.

“Whom! And stop translating everything I say!”

“So, you *are* in love with me?” Richie probes. He starts tracing circles on Eddie’s thigh.

Eddie just smiles all secretively, but it doesn’t even matter, because Richie knows he does. He knows Eddie better than anyone else on this planet. He’ll let Eddie keep thinking he’s got the upper hand though.

“Fine,” Richie sighs, “Don’t say it, then. I’ll just keep being sad and lonely.”

Eddie bites down on his lip before leaning close to Richie’s ear. “*Thanks for rocking my world, Richie, whom I tolerate,*” he whispers.

“Tolerate?” Richie scoffs, “You wanna marry someone you just tolerate, Eds?”

Eddie’s face flushes red. *Got ‘em.*

“Aw,” Richie smiles and kisses Eddie’s nose. “I’m just fucking around, babe.”

“Are we really sticking with ‘babe?’ Like, actually?”

“Yup.”

“Ugh.”

Richie decides that their talk-to-kiss ratio needs to be balanced out a bit more, so he leans in and starts giving Eddie slow, still-sleepy morning kisses.

He enjoys the sounds of the waves, the smell of salt in the air, the creaks their bed makes as they press against each other. He enjoys the way Eddie melts against him, opens his mouth to invite Richie in. He still tastes like Tic-Tacs from last night, a flavor that Richie's dick is starting to develop a Pavlovian response to.

Richie pulls away after a moment and snuggles him closer. “You were good last night too,” he says.

Eddie looks a little embarrassed. “I hope I wasn't too loud. I feel like I might've been.”

He might've been, but who really cares? Richie's favorite song is the strung-together chorus of *oh fuck's* and *shit*, Richie's that Eddie always babbles out when Richie's really taking him there. If it was up to him, he'd crank that shit up.

“I'm sure you were fine,” Richie assures him, smoothing his hair back and kissing his forehead.

“I think someone else shares a wall with us,” Eddie frowns, motioning his head toward the wall behind the headboard. “What if

they heard?”

“Please tell me it was Stan!”

“No, Stan’s down the hall, remember?”

“Oh, right. Damn,” Richie sighs, “That would’ve been *his* karma.”

“What?”

“Listening to me get and give the best head of my life while he has to lie there with no one to snuggle except an alligator.”

Eddie swats him upside the head. “Don’t be mean! Stan actually likes you, you know.”

“What do you mean?”

“He told me! At your birthday party! He said he was going to miss you when you go to college.”

It takes Richie a second to process this information. But when he finally does, he starts smiling so much it leads to straight-up laughing.

Eddie's eyes widen. "You CANNOT tell him I told you that!"

"Don't worry, babe," Richie smiles, "I won't!"

And he really won't. He's just going to use the fuck out of this information, is all.

"Okay..." Eddie eyes him cautiously.

Richie lets the weight of his body rest on Eddie as he touches their foreheads together. "You know," he says quietly, "If we told them, we wouldn't have to worry as much."

"Richie —" Eddie sighs, tired.

"I know, I know! I know you don't want anything to get out because of probability or whatever, but our friends aren't dumb! If we told them not to tell anyone, they wouldn't!"

"Okay, maybe, but what if they're not okay with it?" Eddie frets, chewing on his lower lip, "What if they think it's wrong?"

Richie wants to say they would be ok with it, he *believes* they would be, but if he's being honest, it's never exactly come up.

At least...he's pretty sure it hasn't.

It takes him a moment, but he remembers a time when they were little, when they all used to play baseball down at the Tracker Bros. field. It was before Ben, Mike, and Bev joined the group; and Eddie was scared because his mom said he wasn't allowed to play here. It was summer — wait, autumn — right after school had let out for the day.

My mom says that the guys that run this place are queers, Eddie'd said while watching the other kids play.

I don't think that's true, Bill had replied, and they left it at that.

There's not much to work with there.

"I think they'd be okay with it..." Richie says slowly, hesitantly.

Eddie doesn't look convinced.

"But even if they weren't," Richie continues, more confidently, "I don't think they'd stop being friends with us over it. Losers stick together."

"I guess," Eddie admits, "...It'd still be awkward though."

“Your face is awkward,” Richie teases. He needs to lighten the mood; he doesn’t want Eddie to start the day already anxious about everything.

Eddie rolls his eyes but smiles. “Your mom is awkward.”

“Your toes are awkward.”

Eddie snorts back a laugh. “Uhhhh...your...bellybutton is awkward.”

“Your ass is awkward.”

“Your dick is awkward.”

“Don’t insult my dick!” Richie pouts.

“You started it!”

Richie keeps pouting, so Eddie leans in and kisses his nose. “I’m just fucking with you, Rich.”

Richie stops pouting with a grin. “Me too.”

“So dramatic.”

They're interrupted by a swift knock on the door. “Richie, Eddie!” Bev calls out, “Get up, we're going to go get some food!”

“Be right there!” Richie calls back. He turns back to Eddie with a reluctant sigh. “Guess we better get out of bed.”

“Guess so,” Eddie says nonchalantly, “Too bad.” Then he lowers his hand, cops a feel, and snaps the waistband of Richie's boxers.

Richie yelps, which is pretty embarrassing, honestly, especially when Eddie starts laughing. He forgets how frisky Eddie sometimes gets after they've fooled around. Eddie could be a kinky motherfucker, once he stopped being so anxious about everything.

“Not fair, Eds,” Richie grumbles as Eddie gets out of bed.

“That's your karma,” Eddie says, walking toward their bags, “For fucking dry-humping me in a gross hotel bathroom.”

“I only did that because I'm desperately in love with you,” Richie says dramatically. He flops back on the bed with his legs and arms spread out like a starfish.

“And because *I’m hot when I’m mad*,” Eddie says, mimicking Richie’s voice.

“That too.”

Eddie digs into Richie’s suitcase and tosses a balled-up Hawaiian shirt at him. “Get up! Get dressed.”

Richie whines, but complies. It’s one of his favorite shirts anyway — bright blue with pink flamingos on it. It’d felt very Floridian when he packed it.

Eddie changes into a white t-shirt, which he tucks into his signature red shorts. He keeps a pair of sunglasses rested atop his head and puts a thick white stripe of sunscreen down his nose. He looks like a li’l lifeguard, it’s adorable.

He and Eddie finish getting dressed and on the way out of their bedroom, they run into Ben, who’s leaving his room at the same time.

His room, which is right next to Richie and Eddie’s.

Well, fuck.

“Morning, guys!” Ben says cheerily.

Richie and Eddie exchange nervous glances before smiling back. “Benjamin!” Richie says, a little too enthusiastically, “How are...things?”

“Good?” Ben says, eyeing them.

Eddie nods his head toward the door behind Ben. “You slept in that room?”

“Yeah, I shared with Mike.”

“Oh! Uh, cool?”

“Uhh...how was it?” Richie asks.

Ben shrugs. “Nice. The beds were better than the hotel ones, and it was nice hearing the ocean.”

“Just the ocean, huh?” Richie says (VERY CASUALLY though).

Ben averts his gaze a little, but nods. “Uh, yeah!”

He walks past them and toward the living room. Eddie glances at Richie, and he doesn’t even have to say anything for Richie to know what he’s thinking.

Do you think he heard anything?

Richie makes an exaggerated shrugging motion. Ben did seem a little off, but then again, so had they, and for all they knew, Ben could've just snuck into Bev's room again last night.

Richie gives Eddie a reassuring pat on his shoulder before leading the way to the living room. Everyone else is already in there and they're all dressed like it's summer — shorts, bright t-shirts, and sunglasses all around.

Richie spots Stan standing near the windows and talking with Mike. Smirking, he walks over to the pair, doing his best to keep quiet so Stan won't see it coming.

He doesn't, not until Richie's right behind him and wrapping his arms around him.

"Get off me!" Stan yelps, trying to shove him away.

"Good morning to yee too, best friend o' mine!" Richie declares in a Scottish accent, still hugging Stan from behind.

"I hate you, Richie."

Richie just pinches Stan's cheek. "Sure, you do, Stan the Man! There's nothing *amiss* about it!"

"What are you talking about?!"

"Oh, nothing!" Richie pulls back and grins at Stan, "You should just *dismiss* it!"

"Richie!" Eddie hisses, giving him a look. He looks like a li'l adorable *angry* lifeguard, Richie still can't get over it.

"I'm here to relax, Richie," Stan huffs, "Don't terrorize me!"

Mike's smiling at both of them. "You guys seem to relax by terrorizing one another," he jokes.

"Well, shit!" Richie says in earnest, "That was some deep philosophy there, professor!"

Mike shrugs humbly.

"I will relax over Richie's grave," Stan declares, slipping his sunglasses on.

"Joke's on you, because I'll just come back and haunt your ass, Stan."

Their bickering ends as Bill announces that it's time for them to go.

Their kitchen is fully stocked with dishes and kitchenware, but the fridge is pathetically empty, and they're a platoon of hungry teenagers (or are they technically 'young adults' now? Richie finds the phrase so mom-sounding).

They drive to the nearest grocery store they can find — a humble establishment with sand dusted over the parking lot and weeds growing up through the cracks in the asphalt. When they exit the van, chaos quickly ensues.

"Ladies and Gentlemen," Richie says in an announcer's voice to Ben's camera, using his own flip-flop as a mic, "Welcome to the first annual shopping cart olympics! For our first team, we have Stan the Man and the beautiful Bev! Today, they'll be racing against Big Bill and the lovable, adorable, Mike!"

Bev and Bill are sitting inside shopping carts, while Stan and Mike are ready to push. The parking lot is pretty empty, and the minute they saw how huge the shopping carts were, they couldn't help themselves. Eddie's standing off to the side as Richie and Ben film, shaking his head and muttering about how dangerous this is. Still, he looks interested.

"Alright, racers!" Richie says, "Are you ready?"

His friends cheer.

“First one around the entire parking lot wins!”

“Are you sure you don’t wanna join?” Bill calls out to Eddie.

Eddie pouts. “Yeah.”

“Yeah, you want to, or yeah, you don’t?”

“He does!” Richie answers for Eddie. He’s going to make Eddie have fun on this vacation or die trying.

“What?!” Eddie snaps, “No!”

But it’s too late — Mike is already walking over. With complete ease, he lifts Eddie into his arms and carries him toward the shopping cart.

Eddie’s blushing like crazy, clearly in awe of being carried by Mike.

Richie glances down at his own gangly noodle arms. Unlike Mike, he hasn’t been blessed with god-like farm muscles, or whatever the fuck. He could still lift Eddie just as good as Mike though.

Probably.

Mike sets Eddie down in his cart. Bill brings his knees to his chest so there's room for both of them.

"You realize having two people in your cart will make it harder to push, right?" Stan points out.

"All the more reason it'll be embarrassing when you lose," Mike teases.

"Alright, enough smack talk!" Richie chimes in, "Let's get this race started, fuckers!" He holds up his hand, counts down from three, and then they're off.

The carts rattle as they zip around the parking lot, echoing a big metallic clamor. Even though Mike has two people in his cart, he's able to keep up with Stan, who isn't exactly the brawniest.

Bill, Eddie, and Bev cheer on their drivers as Ben and Richie chase them with the camera.

Despite Mike's best efforts, Stan and Bev still win in the end. When they finally all walk into the store, they're all breathless and still laughing.

They stock up on all the junk food they can fit in their cart. Frozen pizzas, sugary cereals, cheesy potato chips. Ingredients to make

s'mores, ice cream sundaes, sub sandwiches. Bev successfully uses her fake ID and her effervescent charm to get them stocked up on booze too.

They spend the rest of their first day making snacks, lounging on the beach, and trying out booze. When it's time for bed, Richie and Eddie don't do anything wild. After a long day of drinking and just lying around, they're exhausted and just snuggle until they fall asleep.

Tuesday, they drive to a nearby boardwalk where there are more spring breakers their age and older. There aren't any crazy parties like on MTV, just big crowds and long lines for the Ferris wheel and carny games. The day feels blissfully long. Minutes stretch into hours that feel like years as Richie takes in all the sights with his friends.

He tries to win Eddie a prize in a ring-toss game, but his hand-eye coordination is non-existent and Eddie winds up winning him a little stuffed bear instead.

"I'll name it Eddie Bear!" Richie beams as Eddie presents it to him.

"Don't you fucking dare," Eddie grumbles.

In the evening, they all sit on the beach and watch the sun go down. Richie and Bev sneak away to smoke a joint, and her hair is fire-red in the pink light of the sunset. When they go to bed, he and Eddie fool around some more, Eddie making sure to muffle his sounds into Richie's shoulder.

Richie wants to live like this forever: no rules, no obligations, no parents, no separation on the horizon. Their own slice of Neverland. It's intoxicating, more than words can begin to describe.

On Wednesday, they have another beach day. The sky is as blue as the water and the air is warm. They hunt for beach glass, Stan hunts for birds. They read and sip on strawberry wine coolers and splash in the surf.

For a while, they're all swimming in the ocean together, but then a little bit after noon, the other Losers say that they need a break. They leave the water to go rest on their beach towels, leaving just Eddie and Richie amongst the waves.

Eddie goes to follow them, but as soon as he steps out of the water, Richie tackles him from behind. He pushes him down and pins Eddie against in the sand.

"Hey!" Eddie exclaims, laughing, "What the fuck are you doing, dipshit?"

Eddie lies beneath him, hair wet and covered in flecks of sand and water beads that glitter in the sun. Richie wishes more than anything that he could kiss him right now, but their friends are too close.

"You're so pretty," he says instead.

"Oh," Eddie smiles shyly. "So are you."

Richie rubs their noses together, which is definitely crossing a line, but he needs to. He needs to be closer to Eddie, touching Eddie, to feel like they're the same person.

Eddie giggles and rubs his nose against Richie's. They're like cats or some shit, it's great.

After a moment, Eddie flips them over so that he's on top. "I like you a lot," he says.

Richie flips them back over. "I like you too."

"Good," Eddie counters, flipping them over again.

And then they're rolling around in the surf, and they're happy and teasing and laughing, and the foam of the waves keeps splashing over them, and they are infinite.

Richie and Eddie are literally rolling around on top of each other in the sand when Beverly decides that she's had enough.

She and the boys are sitting on their beach towels. They're almost all reading: Bev, a fashion magazine; Bill, a novel; Ben, an adventure epic; and Mike, a nonfiction book on the history of Florida. Stan's just

returned from photographing seagulls and is examining his polaroids proudly.

Bev sets her magazine down and turns to look at the boys. "They like each other," she says, simply and frankly.

Bill looks up at her. "Who likes who?"

She points straight ahead. "Richie and Eddie."

The boys stare at her blankly, dumbfounded.

"Do you mean, like....they *like* like each other?" Ben asks cautiously.

"That's exactly what I mean!"

"But they're always fighting," Ben points out.

"And they're boys!" Bill adds.

Bev eyes him. "Boys can like other boys."

Bill's cheeks turn pink as he glances away. "Yeah, I guess so. But

Richie and Eddie?”

“Richie’s always making jokes about getting with girls,” Stan cuts in.

“Is he though?” Bev counters, “When’s the last time you heard him make a joke about sleeping with a girl?”

“I don’t even listen to his shitty jokes,” Stan mutters, but he still pauses to think it over.

“I guess...he hasn’t really,” Mike admits.

“And they’re always together,” Bev continues, “They room together, they show up late to everything and leave early together. You said yourself that they were flirting with each other back when Richie worked at the diner, Stan!”

Stan frowns, but the memory comes back to him soon enough. “Well, yeah, but I was just kidding. I didn’t actually think—“

“And remember how Eddie was hanging out with Richie before his surprise party?” Bev says, “And how they were all over each other in the pool, and *right now*?”

The boys look down the beach to see Richie and Eddie still wrestling in the sand. They keep laughing and shouting, and their limbs are so tangled up that it’s hard to tell where one of them begins and the

other ends.

“I dunno,” Ben frowns, “I mean, I heard them arguing all last night.”

Bev raises her eyebrows. “You did?”

“Yeah. Mike and I share a wall with them.”

“What were they saying?”

Ben’s brow furrows as he tries to remember. “Mostly Eddie kept cursing at him a lot. Like, the f-word. I couldn’t really hear though — the walls were thick and I was really tired.”

“I didn’t hear much,” Mike says, “I think I fell asleep the moment I hit the pillows.”

Bev thinks this over. Eddie cursing at Richie doesn’t really deter her hunch, since Eddie was constantly telling him to fuck off.

“Well,” she shrugs, “I still think they like each other! They might even be dating already!”

“You’re crazy,” Bill shakes his head, “I just think they’re really good friends. They’ve always been close.”

“I’m not crazy! You’ll see.”

“If you’re so confident, I’ll bet you 10 bucks Richie and Eddie aren’t dating,” Stan says dryly.

Bev smiles. “Really?”

Stan smiles back. “Really.” He says it with the confidence of a man who thinks he’ll be getting an easy 10 bucks. Beverly can’t wait to prove him wrong.

Bev holds out her hand. “You’ve got yourself a deal, Stanley!”

They shake hands, all while Mike just shakes his head, smiling.

“This isn’t going to end well,” he says, turning his attention back to his book.

After they’ve tussled around long enough, they decide to keep swimming for awhile. Eddie can’t get enough of it — it’s so different from swimming in Derry. The water is always moving and vibrantly blue, as opposed to the quarry’s placid earthy hues.

He and Richie swim together, never straying too far apart.

“I wanna learn to surf,” Richie says.

“Do it!” Eddie says. Because he truly believes that Richie could do anything if he tried. “Just make sure you wear a life vest.”

“It’d be like, totally tubular,” Richie says in a surfer-bro voice that makes Eddie laugh.

“You’re such a dork,” Eddie says affectionately.

“Whatever, Eds. Maybe I’ll take lessons in California!”

Ugh. Just hearing Richie say stuff like that makes Eddie’s gut clench. He doesn’t want to think about the fact that their relationship is on a timer, one rapidly approaching the end.

“You should,” he mumbles, trying to push the pain aside.

Richie studies him for a moment before stating: “I want to snuggle you.”

Richie often states what’s on his mind without hesitation. It can be insufferable in some moments, but also completely endearing, like

right now.

“What? Like, right now?” Eddie asks.

“Yeah, right now. I brought a hammock with me, like the camping kind.”

“What? Why are you only mentioning this just now?”

“Because I forgot until just now!”

Eddie sighs.

Richie swims closer and holds Eddie’s hips underwater. “It’s in my suitcase. Why don’t you go get it while I look for some trees we can hook it onto?”

Eddie smiles. “Alright. But only because a nap sounds really fucking nice right now.”

“God, Eds, you’re so old! I wanted to make out!”

“Tough luck.” Eddie nudges him goodbye. He makes his way out of the water and back onto shore. He jogs up the beach, passing his friends on the way.

“Where are you going?” Bev asks, peering at him above the pages of her magazine.

“Uh,” Eddie hesitates, coming to a stop, “Richie and I are just going to try out this hammock he brought.”

The boys turn to each other, brows furrowed like they’re conflicted about something. Bev ignores all of them, keeping her gaze fixated on Eddie. “I’m sure you’ll have a lot of fun together!” She smiles.

“I mean,” Eddie quickly adds, “Not really. He’s so obnoxious, I’m probably gonna leave.”

“Right.”

“Right.”

Awkward silence, then...

“Well, I’m going to go,” Eddie says slowly.

“See you later!” Bev waves.

Why are all of his friends so weird? Eddie loves them more than anything, but it's true. He awkwardly waves goodbye and jogs into their beach house.

He goes to his and Richie's room and kneels before Richie's suitcase, which is lying open near their bed.

It's a mess, like, categorically so. Nothing is folded, and it looks like he just dumped his dresser drawers right inside it. How the hell is Eddie supposed to find anything in this? How is he still attracted to Richie knowing he lives like this?

He pouts as he digs through balled up Hawaiian shirts, obnoxiously-patterned boxers, and mismatched socks. No hammock.

Then he feels plastic. Like a plastic bag.

Eddie pauses, frowns. He knows that Richie and Bev smoke weed sometimes, even if Richie tries to hide it from him. If he brought his stash with him—

But it's not weed. Instead, when Eddie pulls the plastic bag out of Richie's suitcase, he sees that there's something inside it that he probably wouldn't have guessed:

A brand-new bottle of lube and a box of condoms.

“Shit!” Eddie drops them like they gave him an electric shock. He scooches away from the suitcase quickly. The room spins, he can’t breathe — the wind’s been knocked out of him.

But why is he so surprised? Master of Subtly, Richie Tozier was not. And deep down, he’d known exactly what Richie meant with all his vague — *who knows what could happen?* — talk. He hadn’t just suspected — he’d *known*.

Still, it was one thing to just think about something, and it was an entirely different thing to see it in real life.

Eddie takes a steadying breath and moves closer again. He picks up the bag cautiously, examining the contents more closely. They’re hypoallergenic. It makes him laugh aloud all nervous and anxious.

He tries to imagine Richie using them, tries to decide if that’s what he wants. It makes his body flush with want and recoil with anxiety at the same time — he feels like he’s self-destructing.

“Shit, Eddie,” Richie suddenly calls out from down the hall. He pushes their bedroom door open, *“I’m such an idiot, I forgot that I packed the hammock in my backpack, not—”*

Eddie turns to look up at him, still holding the bag, and Richie freezes. His eyes get all wide and his hand clamps down on the door handle tightly.

Neither of them say anything for an excruciating amount of time.

“What is this?” Eddie finally asks. *Stupid question! He knows what they are.*

“Why did you bring these?” He tries again. *Stupider question! There’s literally only one reason Richie would bring these, and it’s not to make fucking water balloons.*

“Just...say something,” he settles on.

Richie shuts the door behind him, body still stiff as a board. “I...uh...I thought it’d be good to be prepared,” he says anxiously, “Y’know, just in case.”

“Planning that far ahead, Rich?” Eddie says, and he means to play it off with a laugh, but it comes out a little hysterical-sounding.

Richie says nothing, looking rather humiliated. He leans back against the door, looking at nothing in particular.

Eddie coughs and collects himself. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I dunno...I guess I just didn’t wanna pressure you or weird you out.”

Eddie doesn't know what to say. He obviously has no experience in what the hell you're supposed to do in a situation like this. "Oh."

"You know what," Richie says suddenly, stepping forward, "Just forget it." He grabs the bag out of Eddie's hands, body movements still awkward and anxious. "I dunno what I was thinking. I'll just toss it."

"No!" Eddie says. He doesn't even think about it, the word just comes out on its own like a guttural, instinctual response.

"No?"

Eddie rises to his feet with shaky legs and stands in front of Richie. He can hear his heartbeat as it pounds in his chest. He wonders if Richie can hear it too.

"Don't throw it out," Eddie mumbles.

Richie swallows. "Oh?"

Eddie nods, slowly at first, and then more decidedly. "I mean, you spent money on them..."

"Yeah...I guess."

“...And...it’s better to be prepared,” he echoes, holding Richie’s gaze intentionally, “Just in case.”

Richie watches him carefully. His body gets a little looser, his gaze a little less defensive. “Okay.”

It’s so awkward between them, which Eddie hates. He wishes Richie would crack a dumb joke or something, but Richie’s clearly too nervous. So, to diffuse the tension, Eddie stands on tip-toe and kisses Richie’s cheek.

“Get the stupid hammock,” he mutters.

They don’t say a word to each other the entire time they’re setting up the hammock between two palm trees. Even when they finally sit inside — Richie first, then Eddie on his lap — they’re silent.

The hammock is different than the one in their clubhouse: it’s nylon, not fabric, and significantly bigger, but it’s still comfortable. It rocks soothingly in the wind as the sun filters down through the trees.

Eddie slips on his sunglasses and lies back, resting his head beneath Richie’s chin. They’ve chosen a spot away from their beach, off in the trees, so he doesn’t have to worry about the other Losers.

Richie lies as stiff as a corpse, so Eddie grabs Richie's arms and makes him hold him.

"You can touch me," he chastises.

And it's like cracking open the floodgates.

"I'm sorry, Eddie, really! I didn't mean for you to find out like that! I wasn't even going to bring it up, honest! I just wanted to be safe in case we decided to do something! And now I've grossed you out and you probably think I'm super weird and pervy but I didn't mean for it to be like that! I just love you so much and I don't want to ever do anything to hurt you!"

He's still shaking after he says his piece. He's holding Eddie too tightly, most likely without realizing it.

Eddie rolls over so that they're face-to-face. "I don't think you're pervy or weird, Rich."

Richie looks nervous. "Really?"

Eddie nods. "I mean, it's not like I haven't thought about it before—"

Richie smiles. "Really?"

Eddie nudges him. “—I just don’t know whether I’m ready yet.”

Richie nods quickly. “Of course, ‘course!”

Eddie looks at him hesitantly. “Is that okay? Are you mad?”

“Fuck, no! I’m just happy you still want to even talk to me.”

Eddie slides closer and runs a finger over Richie’s chest. “We could still do more than just talk,” he suggests, “If you want.”

“I definitely do,” Richie smiles.

They lean in and exchange a few close-mouthed kisses. They’re light and loving and playful like springtime.

Eventually, Eddie pulls back and rolls over again. He loves the warmth of Richie’s chest against his back.

“I love you, Richie,” he whispers, because it feels necessary, and it’s easier to say without looking at him, and because he’s tired of his own game. He doesn’t want Richie to have any doubts.

He can't see Richie's face, but he knows he's smiling. He holds Eddie tighter and kisses his sun-kissed shoulder. "I know."

"Did you just fucking Han Solo me?"

"Yup."

"Fuck off."

Richie just kisses his shoulder again in response. Eddie can't stay annoyed.

The sun leaves Eddie feeling sleepy and dazed. He lifts one of the hands that Richie's holding his waist with and kisses the fingers. He maps them out one by one, stopping to take Richie's pointer finger into his mouth and suck on it.

Richie pulls his finger back hastily. Heat radiates off his chest. "Settle down there, Eds," he says, resting his hand on Eddie's waist again, "Save it for our room, yeah?"

Eddie just hums and leans back into Richie. He feels drunk on the sunlight. He read once that people get tired in the sun because of photons or melatonin or something. He can picture his mom yelling at him about skin cancer, but he's partly in the shade and he's got sunscreen on.

Also, he doesn't care, for once (or at least not as much).

"Your suitcase is so gross, by the way," he mumbles.

"Sorry, mom."

Eddie elbows him. They're quiet again for a bit, but it's not tense and awkward like before. This time it's blissfully comfortable.

Richie interrupts their silence approximately five minutes later.

"Guys could get married in Tozier Town."

Eddie frowns and rolls over to look at him. "Are you fucking high?"

"No! Just thinking and stating facts."

Eddie pushes up his sunglasses so that they're resting in his hair. "Why were you thinking about that?"

Richie shrugs.

Eddie smiles nonetheless. "Well, I dunno if I wanna take whatever

LSD is required to go to *Tozier Town*.”

“But that’s the best part!” Richie teases. “You get super high, and then you get to marry your best bro.”

“How romantic.”

“I know.”

“If we got married and you showed up high, I’d kick your ass.”

“That’s fair.”

They’re talking about it so casually, like it’s something they’ll actually have to deal with someday. But as fun as it is to daydream about such lofty things; it only leaves Eddie feeling hollow inside, knowing that they could never be true.

He knows he’s young and his brain hasn’t fully developed yet, but he feels like Richie is his forever. Yeah, they’ve only been dating for two years, but they’ve been friends way longer, and that has to count for something, right?

He just wishes things were different. He wants to just have a normal life with Richie, one where they don’t have to hide or feel shame. He wants to hold Richie’s hand and let Richie give him kisses in public without fear of being seen. He wants to daydream about forever and

have a chance of it being real.

Richie cups Eddie's face with one hand, runs his thumb over Eddie's mouth. Eddie memorizes the way Richie memorizes him.

"Do you think things will change?" Eddie says quietly.

Richie doesn't have to ask why he's talking about. "I dunno," he mumbles, which is exactly what Eddie thought he'd say. He's not sure why he asked, as if Richie's some kind of all-knowing being. Sometimes it just helped to say things out loud, even if he knew it wasn't going to make a difference.

"But if they ever do," Richie continues, moving his hand to smooth back Eddie's hair, "I'm driving right to wherever you are."

Eddie's breath catches. He feels dizzy, happily so. "What, is that some kind of shitty proposal?" He says, trying to laugh.

Richie strokes Eddie's hair quietly, protectively. Saying nothing.

"Richie?"

"We're still teenagers," Richie murmurs.

Not a yes.

Not quite a no, either.

Notes for the Chapter:

The Losers are onto them! Richie and Eddie are still dumb! Will Stan ever have a day of peace??????

Also if you have anything you'd like to see in this fic lmk below -- I need a few more scenes to pad out the next chapter i promise i'm professional

6. Chapter 6

Fuck Twister.

It's a game that's destined to kill Richie, both physically and mentally. Like, every aspect of it is painful, from the weird positions Richie has to contort himself into, to the irresistible views he has to avoid staring at.

It was Bev's idea to have a sleepover in the living room Wednesday night. They assembled their blankets and quilts and pillows and arranged them in a big circle in the middle of the room. Then she had the great idea of playing Twister, which someone packed, for some reason, and of course, everyone agreed, because who doesn't love Twister? Richie had even been excited at first.

But then he noticed how short Eddie's sleep shorts were. And then they started playing, and Eddie had to bend over and put his right hand on blue or whatever the fuck, which left Richie with a stellar view that he has to force himself not to stare at in front of his friends.

Besides all that, Richie's physically very uncomfortable right now. His limbs are all kinds of mixed up and he's basically a human pretzel now.

So yeah, fuck Twister.

He's right behind Eddie, and someone else is tangled around him and breathing down his neck. Richie practically cracks his neck to see

who.

“Bill! Stop breathing so much on me!”

“Sorry!” Bill says, “I can’t help it!”

“Left hand, green!” Bev calls out. She’s sitting on the sofa alongside Ben and Mike, who are looking way too entertained by this situation.

The only green space nearest to Richie is in front of Eddie. He leans his body forward and places his hand over it. The new position means he’s stretched over Eddie doggy-style, fighting to keep himself upright.

Eddie glances down at Richie’s hands. “If you fall on me...”

“I won’t!”

“I think I’m slipping,” Stan frets. Richie can’t even crane his head enough to see how he’s holding up.

Bev spins the wheel. “Left leg, blue!”

Aw, shit. Richie tries, but too many things happen at once. Both he and Eddie move their left legs at the same time, so they bump into

each other. And then Bill slips, and Stan slips, then everyone slips. Richie's limbs give out from under him as he drops down on Eddie and squashes him like a bug.

"Ow!" Eddie snaps.

"Sorry, Eds!" Richie exclaims, but he's trying not to laugh. There's just something about Eddie saying a word as comical as 'ow' to express genuine pain that cracks Richie up.

"Good game!" Bev says as the boys lie in a crumpled heap on the mat, groaning in pain.

"Easy for you to say," Stan grumbles.

"It is pretty easy," Mike laughs.

Ben takes a picture.

"We're too old for this," Stan grumbles as he gets up.

"Yeah, we can't throw out Grandpa Stan's back again!" Richie exclaims, "How are we gonna pay for his medical bills? We'll just have to leave him on the front step of that old folk's home by the grocery store." He pinches Eddie's cheek before peeling himself off him and helping Eddie up.

Weirdly, Stan doesn't threaten Richie's life in response. Instead, he just glances between him and Eddie.

Richie eyes him back, but Stan looks away quickly. "Does anyone wants to play Monopoly?" He asks.

"You always wanna play Monopoly," Richie whines.

"Because he's the best at it," Mike smiles.

Stan just smiles modestly. Richie hates playing with him because Stan wins *every time*. He uses his evil little future-accounting-major powers to bankrupt Richie *every time*.

Richie manages to weasel his way out of playing Monopoly by painting his nails with Bev. While the other boys play, he's content to just sit with Bev and just listen to the game (while generously offering live commentary though).

Richie's pretty sure that if he was into girls and wasn't in love with Eddie, he'd be fighting it out with Ben for Bev. He loves the focused glint in her eyes, the smell of her lavender shampoo, the way her delicate fingers hold his hand as she paints his nails black. They do this every now and then, because Bev likes to practice on others and it makes Richie feel like a rock star.

“In another life, I would’ve learned to play the guitar,” Richie says. He keeps his hand very still so Bev won’t smudge.

“It’s not too late to learn,” Bev points out, talking to his hand, “You’re only 18.”

“Yeah, I guess. Haystack, don’t buy the fucking Water Works. No one lands on that shit!”

Ben buys it anyway. “I need properties,” he defends, “Stan’s already building houses.”

Richie can’t believe they only have tonight, tomorrow, and Friday, and then their vacation is over. He tries to do anything he can to not think about that.

“What should we do tomorrow?” He hastily asks Bev.

“We could go into town again,” Bev offers, “And we still haven’t made s’mores yet, we could light a bonfire.”

“Sounds good,” Richie nods.

“Don’t move around so much,” Bev chastises.

“Sorry!”

Bev finishes one hand and starts working on the other. “Maybe you could join in on the game when we’re done,” she casually suggests, “I’m sure one of the guys would let you partner up with them.”

“Nah, Eddie doesn’t need my help, he’s actually pretty good at that shit.”

“I didn’t say it had to be Eddie,” Bev smiles.

Richie winces. *Rookie mistake!* “I know, but, uh, Eddie...sucks.”

“You just said he was good!”

“Yeah, I lied. He like comes in last place every time.”

Eddie, seated only a few feet away, pouts at them. “No, I don’t! I have *three* railroads right now, asshole!”

Richie smiles apologetically. “Sorry, Eds.” He mirrors Eddie as he pouts back, hopefully cutely.

Eddie rolls his eyes at him but smiles before turning his attention back to the game. He’s also kind of blushing a little. Richie doesn’t

want to brag, but he has a pretty fucking good puppy-dog pout. It totally gets Eddie every time. It's like a superpower or something.

He focuses on Bev again, who's looking as bemused as always. Time to counter-attack.

"I'm sure you could team up with Ben," he says, keeping his voice low. He doesn't need more commentary from anyone listening in.

Bev eyes him. "What's that supposed to mean?"

Richie just smiles innocently. He blows on the drying nails of his other hand. "Nothin'."

"Nothing is ever nothing with you, Richie," Bev smiles. Her cheeks are slightly pinker than usual, but she ignores it well.

She finishes his nails, then does her own, and the Monopoly game dwindles to an end. Richie doesn't think they've ever actually finished a game — they just kind of cut it off after everyone gets stuck in a lull of circling the board and paying Stan money.

Richie shakes his nails even though they're dry by now. He moves to sit behind Eddie and check out his haul. Three railroads, a yellow monopoly, and a comfortable amount of cash. He pats Eddie's shoulder amiably. "How'd the game go?"

“Stan won,” Bill smiles.

“Of course.”

“It’s all about strategy,” Stan says humbly.

“And a little luck,” Ben points out.

“A lot of luck,” Eddie grumbles, “Stan didn’t land on any of my houses! He just rolled past them like, five times!”

“Yellow doesn’t have a super big probability,” Stan explains. “It’s just pretty average.”

“How the hell do you know all this stuff?” Richie asks.

“It’s interesting!”

Richie shrugs indifferently. His hand slips from Eddie’s shoulder, catching his attention on the way down.

“Lemme see,” Eddie says, grabbing Richie’s hand. It’s funny how they’ve literally been dating for years and Richie’s heart still swoops when Eddie touches his hand. As Eddie examines his fingers, Richie thinks about how great it’d be to hold hands right now, to see his

dark nails beside Eddie's meticulously cleaned and polished ones.

"Cool," Eddie says. He runs the pad of his thumb across one of the nails.

"You should have Bev do yours, then we'd match!"

"No way — too many chemicals and acetone and shit."

"Your loss, I look cool as fuck." Since he can't really hold Eddie like he wants to, he settles for just sitting close to him.

The boys clean up the game. Wanting to do something other than snack on junk food or play another board game, Bev suggests that they try face masks.

"Aren't those for girls?" Eddie frets.

"They're for everyone!" Bev deters, "They'll make your skin look great! You just put it on, wait a few minutes, then peel it off."

Bill gapes at her. "It peels off our skin?"

"No, you peel *it* off your skin."

Ben winces. "Does it hurt?"

"No!"

"I guess I'll try it," Mike shrugs.

"Me too!" Ben quickly adds. Of course.

The rest of the boys give in, even Eddie when he learns it's all-natural. Bev retrieves a green tube that has pictures of cucumbers all over it. The boys break up and go to sit on their sleeping areas. They snack on food and listen to the portable radio they have while they wait for Bev to help them.

"So," Bev says, carefully applying it to Mike's face first, "This goes on smooth, but it dries hard."

Richie turns to Eddie with a smirk.

Eddie eyes him. *What?* He mouths.

Like jizz, Richie mouths back, followed by a jacking off motion.

Eddie kicks him. “*You’re so gross!*” But he’s snorting back laughter.

Richie cracks up.

“What are you two laughing about?” Stan asks suspiciously.

“I’m not laughing!” Eddie exclaims, “Richie’s making jokes about his dick.”

“What else is new?” Mike teases.

“Sorry, babe,” Richie says to Eddie easily. He doesn’t even think about it, nor does he notice the pointed looks Bev and Stan exchange.

Eddie just sighs and gives him a wry smile. Probably because he’s literally in love with Richie and therefore Richie is like, totally irresistible to him now or something.

Which, by the way, he still can’t get over that. He already knew that Eddie loved him, but hearing Eddie finally say the words made him feel like a sappy love song. Part of it feels so cliché, to be so completely in love with his high school sweetheart, his first love, but whatever. His parents met in high school, and they’re still together. Why couldn’t he and Eddie stay together too?

He smiles back at Eddie, pokes his thigh, and Eddie jolts and smiles some more. Then it’s his turn to get his face mask. He sits perfectly

still as Bev sits before him and smooths the cucumber-scented compote over his face. When she finishes, Eddie smiles excitedly.

When Richie's rich and famous, he'll have to take Eddie to Europe, and then maybe a spa or some shit. He'd probably love getting all clean and zen.

Bev kneels before Richie to apply his mask next. He sets his glasses aside and smiles expectantly. Her fingers are light and delicate as they rub over his skin.

"You have nice freckles, Richie," Bev says.

"So do you!" Richie replies playfully, "You know you're the prettiest one here, right?"

"Hush," Bev's hands are full, so she nudges him slightly awkwardly. Then, coyly and quietly, she adds, "What about Eddie?"

Richie's glad the green mask is on his face so she can't see him blush. "What about him?" He murmurs back.

"He's pretty cute."

Does she know? There's no way she could know! Not from his one dumb Monopoly slip-up! Richie hasn't told anyone. Except maybe Ben told her about the sex sounds. Shit, what if he did? Then she

would know! But what if Ben didn't? She could just be fucking with him, trying to get a reaction. Whatever, he's got this.

"Why do you keep bringing him up? Want me to put in a good word for ya' or something?" Richie winks.

"Funny. Why were you fighting last night?"

"Fighting?"

"Ben says he heard you yelling at each other."

"What the fuck? We weren't —" And then he considers how Eddie exclaiming 'FUCK, Richie,' every five minutes might have sounded to poor, innocent Ben out of context.

And then he can't stop laughing.

"What?" Bev eyes him.

"Uh, yeah, we were fighting," Richie says as he struggles to keep the laughs at bay.

"About what?"

“Oh, you know...Eddie kept, uh, *mouth*ing off.”

Richie's often truly amazed by his excellent puns.

Bev just keeps eyeing him. “Okay...” She doesn't question him further though, and instead finishes up with him and goes to Bill.

“What was that about?” Eddie leans over to ask, “What were you guys talking about?”

“Nothing, don't worry about it.” Richie turns to Eddie with a grin. Their faces are both green and gloopy. “What the fuck?” He laughs, “We look like zombies!”

“Wait,” Eddie says excitedly, “Watch this!” He rolls his eyes back and sticks out his tongue, very zombie-like.

“Ahh!” Richie exclaims, “It's a Zomb-Eds!”

Eddie groans, also very zombie-like. But he soon breaks character and starts laughing right along with Richie.

Richie might be projecting, but ever since he and Eddie talked things out in the hammock, he feels like things have been better. Not that they were bad before, or anything, but it felt like they were

constantly avoiding talking about it. They'd never really talked about it —*doing* it — before today, and now that they have, they don't have to worry about what the other person is thinking anymore.

Maybe Richie could convince Eddie to finally tell they're friends that they're dating if they talked that out too. He's sick of feeling like he's under a microscope; like every interaction he has with Eddie is going to be investigated and analyzed.

Also, more importantly, he's just tired of feeling trapped in the arcade. Sometimes, it feels like he never left that moment: Henry yelling at him while everyone just watched, eyes staring, whispers judging, gazes leering. The panic and humiliation that drowned him. Alone and exposed.

It got a little better, and the arcade got a little bigger, because then he got older and he learned that Eddie was there with him too. But at the end of the day, they're still stuck there, every. single. day. Maybe if they let the other Losers in, it'd feel bigger and safer again.

The analogy makes sense in his head, but he feels like if he tried to explain it to Eddie, he'd sound totally delusional. Still, he has to try.

Just...not when all their friends are around, obviously.

Ben gets some badass video footage of him and Eddie looking all zombie-like. Afterward, he leaves the camera out and running, claiming he doesn't want to miss a single moment.

Richie couldn't agree more.

After face masks, their skin is kinda glowier and a lot softer. They sprawl back on the floor, listening to the radio at a lowered volume and passing around a bottle of bourbon that makes their faces scrunch up when they take a drink.

The lights are off, and it's late. They've reached that obligatory part of every sleepover where chatter is exchanged in sleepy tides; rushing in one minute, ebbing away the next. The alcohol makes them sleepier and their conversations less lucid.

"Do you think animals think?" Stan asks.

"What the fuck," Richie snorts. He's lying on his side and watching Eddie. Eddie's bundled under blankets a couple of feet away, and Richie can't tell if he's awake or not — his eyes are closed.

"Of course they think," Bill says, "They need to know how to find food and take care of each other."

"But do they think like us?" Stan continues, "Like about other stuff? Like do they think about the future or remember stuff?"

"I hope not," Mike mumbles, "I hate when Grandpa makes me put

down our sheep. I always worry that they know what's coming."

"I don't think they do," Ben says quickly, reassuringly, "We're human, and we don't always know what's coming next. Technically, we never do, we can only guess."

Richie used to love that; the idea that every day was unpredictable and could turn into a grand adventure at a moment's notice. Now the idea of the future being this big unknowable void makes him nervous.

"What are you guys going to be when you're older?" Richie asks. Not what they want to be, what they *will* be. He needs something concrete to fill in the empty spaces.

"I want to be a writer," Bill says without hesitation.

"What will you write about?" Bev asks.

Bill takes a moment to think. "Things that scare me. It's easier when they're on the page, and not in my head."

After a moment of silence, Bev pipes in. "I want to design clothes. I loved working on the school plays."

"You could be a model," Ben says. Then, as if just hearing his own words for the first time, he quickly backtracks, "Just because it'd be

cool to show off your own clothes is what I meant,” he adds in one breath.

Richie has to stuff his fist in his mouth to keep from laughing out loud. He turns to look at Eddie, who’s grinning knowingly at him. So he *is* awake. Good.

“Aw, thanks, Ben,” Bev says sweetly.

“What about you, Ben?” Stan asks.

“Oh! Um, I think I’d like to build stuff. Either that, or something where I can read a lot. I haven’t decided yet.”

“Reading for work would be fun,” Mike says, “I think I’d like that a lot. Maybe we can both become librarians, Ben.”

Ben laughs lightly. “Yeah!”

“I just want to be happy,” Stan mumbles, unable to mask the tinge of dejection in his voice, “I don’t care what I do.”

“You’ll have to become a professional Monopoly player,” Richie says affectionately and quickly, “Or someone that handles money, like a CEO or something. Something smart.”

“Oh,” Stan says, and Richie can hear his surprise over Richie giving him a genuine answer. And sure, maybe it’s unexpected, but Richie can’t just sit back and let Stan be miserable. Richie rags on him all the time, but he hates to see Stan fold in on himself.

“What about you, Richie?” Bev says with a smile in her voice, “You’ve gotta have big plans!”

“Hollywood, baby!” Richie beams, “My name will be in lights, my face on every billboard!”

“Ew,” Stan says.

“As in *Entertainment Weekly*? You’re damn right, Stan! I forgot about the magazines!”

“Ugh.”

“You’re crazy,” Mike laughs, though it’s without malice.

“But you’ll do it,” Eddie contends. Richie’s gaze meets his in the dark, and they smile.

“And what about you, Eds?” Richie asks.

“You should be a doctor!” Bill suggests.

“Dr. K!” Richie laughs.

“Uh, I dunno,” Eddie grimaces, “Then I’d have to be around sick people like, all the time. That sounds horrible.”

“A janitor, then,” Richie shrugs, “You’ll be cleaning all the time.”

“Fuck you, dude! I’m not becoming a janitor!” Eddie frowns, “That sounds even worse than becoming a doctor!”

“I’m sure you’ll think of something,” Bill assures him, “We don’t have to decide anything yet.”

Eddie nods, even though no one other than Richie can see. He looks worried: he’s all pouty and he rolls onto his side, his back to Richie.

The tide pulls back into the sea after that, returning only briefly for Bill to wonder aloud if college will pass by as fast as high school did. One by one, Richie hears his friends drift off, their snores and sighs melding with the music still playing and the waves breaking against the beach.

Richie closes his eyes, ready to commit to falling asleep, when Eddie suddenly crawls on top of him. He weasels his way under Richie’s blanket and lies on him, his head on Richie’s chest and their legs

interlocked.

“Hello to you too,” Richie whispers, wrapping his arms around Eddie.

“M’cold,” Eddie mumbles, snuggling closer, “You’re comfy.”

“What about—“

“They’re asleep,” Eddie whispers, “And like I said, I’m *cold*.” He kisses the underside of Richie’s jaw.

Richie doesn’t question anything after that, even though it has to be almost 70 degrees in here. After all, he’s literally used the same excuse, and he’d literally never complain about having an excuse to snuggle his boyfriend.

“More Eds for me,” he jokes, pulling Eddie closer.

Eddie just hums sleepily and nods.

“Love you,” Richie says into his ear.

“Love you,” Eddie echoes, and he already sounds half-asleep.

“Night, Eds.”

“Night, Chee.”

And oh.

Oh.

That’s new.

“Chee?” Richie whispers like the sappy lovesick fuck he is.

But Eddie’s already asleep and snoring softly, leaving Richie to stare at the ceiling and bask in the feeling of being 18 and utterly absorbed by his affections.

Ever since Eddie found those things in Richie’s suitcase, it’s all he’s been able to think about.

Even though he told Richie that he wasn’t sure he was ready, his brain doesn’t seem to have gotten the memo yet. The stupidest and randomness things keep setting him off and getting him all worked up.

Like Richie's hands — during the whole sleepover, he couldn't stop staring at Richie's hands. His hands on the Twister mat, clutching the bourbon bottle, black fingernails. His mind traced every place they'd been, every place they could be.

And when he's not thinking about Richie's features, he's thinking about ways to get closer to him. Like cuddling him after everyone else falls asleep, or sucking on his fingers in the hammock. All of his constant worries about who could see or what they'd think have been replaced by a wanton drive of need.

And when he's not thinking about all that, he's thinking about *that*. Richie's hands on his hips as he rocks Eddie into the bathroom counter, Richie gripping Eddie's hair and the sheets.

Fuck, he feels like —

Well, a teenage boy, he supposes. Aren't they all supposed to be like this? Or maybe something's just wrong with Eddie; 17 feels more adult to him, like he's supposed to have more control of himself by now. Maybe he just needs to calm the fuck down.

Except...

...He can't. Because again, the stupidest things keep setting him off. Like right now, for instance.

It's the morning after the sleepover, Thursday, and Eddie and Richie are sitting at the kitchen table eating cereal. Richie's finished his and is currently attempting to balance his spoon on his nose.

After they all woke up from their sleepover around 6 AM, they were all still exhausted and trudged back to their bedrooms. Eddie and Richie were the first to reawaken, so it's just the two of them in the kitchen right now.

"Shit, Eds, I think I got it this time!" Richie claims just before the spoon clatters onto the table. He winces at the sound, still clearly a little hungover from last night.

Eddie giggles.

"That was just the practice attempt," Richie claims, picking it up again, "Now I'll get it."

"Wasn't that your like, third practice attempt?" Eddie points out.

"Shh." Richie tilts his head back and tries again, and then Eddie can't stop staring at his throat. Pale skin, Adam's apple, long column. He could leave so many hickeys there...

"I got it!" Richie exclaims. He's beaming and sitting perfectly still, spoon delicately hanging off his nose.

Eddie claps politely. "You're so talented," he says, only half-teasing.

"Thanks! Get the camera!"

"I don't have it! Ben took it when he woke up!"

"Shit!" The spoon falls. Richie pouts and winces. "Now no one will believe me!"

Eddie gets out of his chair and grabs their empty bowls. He stops and ruffles Richie's hair with his free hand. "I saw it."

"Yeah, but you have to believe me," Richie sighs, "You're my b—"

Bill walks into the kitchen.

"—Best friend!" Richie finishes loudly, "Morning, Bill!"

Bill groans. "Don't talk so loud, I have a headache."

"Don't we all."

Bill just grabs a Gatorade from the fridge and trudges back to bed.

Eddie puts their bowls in the sink. He's still wearing his little sleep shorts from last night and wonders if Richie notices.

"Well," he says, walking back over to Richie, "It's only 8:30, so everyone else is probably going to sleep in some more before we go out."

He stands next to the table while Richie still sits. Richie grabs him and holds him by the hips, runs his thumbs underneath the back hem of Eddie's shorts. "Yeah, probably."

Eddie holds back a shiver. *So he has noticed.*

"I'm sure we could find a way to pass the time," Richie continues playfully.

Eddie bites down on his lower lip. "It's too early for that," he says meekly. It's hard to concentrate on their conversation when Richie replaces his thumbs with his whole hands.

"Jeez, we don't have to do anything wild!" Richie smirks, "I just mean that we could snuggle and play the Game Boy and shit. Get your mind out of the gutter, Eds."

Eddie feels himself blush. If only Richie knew that he feels like he's been living in the 'gutter' for the past 24 hours. "Shut up!" he says,

flustered, “We can do that in a minute, I gotta go shower first.”

“Is that an invitation?” Richie gives him a squeeze.

Eddie swallows down a yelp. “You wish!”

“Obviously.”

“*Get your mind out of the gutter*,” Eddie echoes mockingly, “Also, what kind of lame saying is that anyway? You sound like a middle-aged dad!”

“That’s what my dad says when I swear,” Richie laughs, “I dunno what it fucking means!” He lowers his hands and Eddie tries not to pout at the loss of contact.

“You know what it means — you literally call yourself a Trashmouth.”

“Yeah, Trashmouth, not *Brain Gutter*. That sounds...like a pretty sweet band name, actually.”

“You’re dumb,” Eddie smiles, “If you make a band and name it Brain Gutter, I’ll break up with you.”

“No you won’t, you’d be the number one groupie!”

Eddie hates that because it’s somewhat true.

“Whatever,” he huffs. Then he cups Richie’s cheeks and gives him a long, slow kiss, because he feels like it. “I’ll see you in a bit,” he murmurs.

Richie just nods, all starry-eyed and smiling dopily.

Eddie feels like he’s floating as he makes his way to his and Richie’s bathroom. He’s pretty sure that if he was a cartoon character, he’d have little hearts floating around his head. He would’ve invited Richie to join him, but he wants to actually get clean. He always feels grimy in the morning until he showers, and he knows Richie would do everything he could to disrupt him.

As he showers though, he keeps daydreaming about Richie coming in anyway. How Richie would smirk at him, push him against the shower wall...

But he’s not ready for that, right? That’s what he said yesterday! It was how he felt...

...Then. Now, he’s not so sure. He can still feel Richie’s hands beneath his shorts from a few moments ago, and he wants more.

“Calm down!” Eddie mutters to himself as he rubs water out of his eyes. He sets the water to be colder.

He’s not ready. He should wait until like, college, right?

Wait for who? A cruel thought leers, Richie will be 3,000 miles away! He already has his life planned out, and you won’t be in it.

Eddie frowns and pushes that aside. Richie will visit him. He said he would, and Richie would never lie to him like that. Richie wouldn’t, he just wouldn’t.

He starts to shiver, so he turns the water back up. He spends a little extra time in the shower, making sure to clean himself thoroughly. Uh, *very* thoroughly.

Just in case.

Then he finishes up, gets dressed, and spends the rest of the morning snuggling Richie as he watches him play some video games.

Once everyone wakes up, they spend another day in town. They visit shops, take photos beneath palm trees taller than houses, and rent bikes. They peddle down a bike trail that follows a beach speckled with colorful towels, umbrellas, and sunbathers. Their lunch consists

of drippy ice cream cones that they buy off a little shack by the shore (Eddie tries not to worry about how sanitary it could or couldn't be).

Eddie can see why Mike would want to live here. Despite the alligators and hurricanes, it seems fun. There's always something interesting to look at.

At sunset, Ben sets the camera on a timer so they can all take a picture together. They sit close together on the sand, their faces smushed together as they try to make each other laugh. After the camera flashes, they crowd around to watch it develop.

"We look cute as fuck," Richie says as it come into view, "Even Stan for once!"

Stan kicks sand on him.

"We do look nice," Bill smiles.

After they've all had a good look, Ben hands the photo to Mike.

"You should keep it," he says.

"Why me?" Mike asks, surprised.

“Because you were the one who wanted to come here the most,” Ben explains.

“And because you’re the best!” Bill adds, patting Mike on the shoulder.

“And because if we give it to Richie, he’d lose it,” Bev teases.

“Fuck you, no I wouldn’t!” Richie exclaims, still dusting sand off himself.

“Yeah, you would,” Eddie smirks knowingly. Richie loses stuff literally all the time — not intentionally, he’s just scattered-brained. One time he lost his glasses and they were literally on top of his head the whole time.

Richie flips Eddie off, which Eddie mirrors with a smile.

“Well, thanks,” Mike says. He takes the picture and carefully stores it in his wallet. “I’ll keep it forever.”

“You better,” Richie says, “That’ll be worth money someday!”

“Should I ask for an autograph now?” Mike jokes.

“Whenever you want, Mikey!”

“C’mon,” Bev says, tugging on Richie’s ear playfully, “It’s getting dark; let’s go home.”

It goes without saying that home isn’t Derry.

By the time they get home, it’s dark. They stopped at a burger joint on the way back, and now they’re full and eager to finally light the bonfire they’ve been talking about. It’s a perfectly cool night as they hunt for sticks and driftwood in the dark, flashlights marking their locations as they flit through the trees.

They pile all the wood they find in a pit they dig in the sand. Bev and Richie use their lighters to get it going, then Mike and Bill teach them all how to keep it going.

“We should go camping,” Bill suggests, “Before the summer ends.” Everyone agrees.

They bring the radio outside and listen to rock n’ roll and pop hits as they make s’mores and drink beers. Richie likes his marshmallows burnt like a psychopath, but Eddie works alongside Stan and Bill to get theirs perfectly golden.

They joke and laugh as the fire crackles and pops. When Eddie's literally filled himself to the brim with s'mores, he sits back on the sand and mulls over his drink, soaking in the togetherness.

Richie, as he always does when he's tipsy, starts dancing. Eddie watches him contently, enjoying the sound of his laugh and the look of his smile. He likes seeing floating sparks of the fire reflect in his glasses.

Richie would be — will be — a great comedian; he's so vibrant and full of life — he deserves to have everything he dreams of.

Eddie still doesn't even know who he wants to be. He knows that he wants to go to school in New York, because he got a track scholarship and because it's a good school, but that's it.

He knows he wants Richie too, but that's no good, not gonna happen.

Fuck, being without Richie is going to be so hard. What will he even do? How often will they see each other? What if Richie meets someone else? Someone who isn't scared of public pools and doesn't need to sanitize their hands after a handjob?

Their conclusion feels inevitable. There are so many factors stacked against them — the distance, the less than 2%, the prejudice they'd face — that Eddie realizes he'll eventually just have to come to terms with the fact that they can't be together forever.

So, what the fuck is he supposed to do?

Richie meets his gaze from across the bonfire and smiles. He's dancing along to the music with Bev, limbs moving freely and expressively, hair tousled and mussed.

Eddie smiles back, even though it hurts. It hurts knowing that time and change are inevitable, that the end is always near.

But it's not here yet. Now is still now, and he still has Richie. He should make the most of every second they have together while they can. No more teasing, no more holding back *I love you's*. He wants Richie to be his first everything. First kiss, first love, first time. Because that's something that time can't erode. No matter what happens to them or when they fall apart, they'll always share their firsts.

Eddie finishes off the rest of his drink and gets up, face set with determination. He walks around the fire and stands next to Richie. "Hey!" He says shyly, tugging on Richie's sleeve.

"Hey, Spaghetti!"

"I'm ready," Eddie whispers.

Richie slows his dancing and frowns. "Huh? Ready for what?"

Eddie pulls him away from the others and gives Richie a pointed look, hoping he's not blushing too hard. He probably is.

It takes him a second, but Richie's eyes widen. "Wait, shit! Do you mean—"

"Yes."

"Fuck, ok." Richie's voice lowers considerably. He drags a hand through his hair and exhales slowly. "Wow!"

Eddie smiles and nods. "Wow."

Richie glances around at the rest of their friends before leaning closer. "What, like..right now?"

"I mean," If he wasn't before, Eddie's definitely red now, "Yeah, kind of."

Richie doesn't reply.

"But only if you want to!"

"*If I want to?*" Richie echoes in disbelief, "Eddie, I...fuck, man."

“Is that a yes?”

“Uh, yes? Yes, yes, a fucking million times yes, Eds!”

Eddie giggles. He feels equally giddy and nervous, and considerably happier than he was a minute ago. Richie is here and Richie is now and Richie wants him. “Then let’s go.”

Richie nods. He steps closer to the others and raises his voice. “Hey, I’m pretty tired! Uh, Eds too. We’re gonna call it a night!”

Bill pouts. “But it’s only 11!”

“Don’t judge! Not all of us are wild party animals like you, Big Bill!”

“Well, goodnight then,” Bev says, watching them carefully.

“Night!” Richie waves. And then he starts walking fast, Eddie right behind him.

As soon as they’re far enough away from the bonfire, Eddie holds Richie’s hand. Richie squeezes it tightly and smiles at him.

They don't say anything as they enter the beach house and walk to their room. Once they're inside, Eddie turns on the lamp and closes the curtains. Richie locks the door.

Eddie's heart is pounding wildly. He can feel the beat of it in his throat and ears.

He stands by the window, Richie stands by the door. They smile at each other nervously.

"Do you want me to put on some music?" Richie asks, "Or light the fireplace?"

"It's like, 70 degrees! Why would you wanna light a fire?"

"I dunno!" Richie smiles, "I just thought it'd be like, romantic and shit."

"We'd get sweaty."

"We probably will anyway," Richie points out.

"Y-yeah!" Eddie laughs nervously. Oh god. This is really happening. They're just gonna...yeah. Right now. It was so much easier to decide on the beach, so less imminent.

Neither of them make a move toward the other. They both stand on their sides of the room, waiting for the other to do something first.

Even though Eddie's freaking out, he also wants this to be good. Fun, even. One of his favorite things about Richie is that he knows how to make the best of any situation. Even if things are scary or hard, he'll be ready with a joke or a smile. Some might find it annoying, but to Eddie, it's brave and admirable. Maybe he needs to be more like Richie right now.

So, he takes a breath, crosses the room, and jumps into Richie's arms with a smile. "Hurry up, hot stuff."

"Hey!" Richie laughs as he catches him. "Someone's feisty tonight."

"I want you tonight," Eddie hums, nibbling on Richie's neck, "Or at least sometime this century."

"I don't want to rush you, Eds."

"You've *been* not rushing me," Eddie complains, "I told you, I'm ready."

Richie slips an arm under Eddie to keep him in the air, then uses his other hand to cup his face and pull him in for a searing kiss.

Eddie kisses him back, pressing his lips against Richie eagerly. He

pours all his nerves and excitement into it, sucking Richie's lower lip into his mouth and biting down.

Richie hums, but his arm is starting to shake. He takes them to the bed and sets Eddie back on the floor. Then he pulls the covers back and motions for Eddie to get inside.

"After you, mate!" he says in a British accent.

"Oh my god," Eddie says as he slides beneath the blanket, "If you use an accent while we're in the middle of it, I will leave."

"Bloody hell, babes!" Richie exclaims, still British, "I just wanted a nice shag with my luv!"

"Shut the fuck up," Eddie smiles and shakes his head, "Literally shut up. You're so embarrassing!"

Richie climbs into bed with Eddie and pulls the covers back over them. He looks completely pleased with himself. "You think I'm funny," he smiles, poking Eddie's cheek.

"Maybe," Eddie lies.

"You do," Richie insists, and then he's kissing him again.

They kiss for what feels like hours until Eddie's shaking with need beneath Richie.

Eddie lifts his hips off the bed and presses them against Richie, searching for some semblance of relief. They're both hard, but Richie's still not doing anything other than kissing him. Sure, it's great, but it's not *enough*.

Eddie lets out a frustrated sound, grabs Richie's hand, and pulls it to where he needs him.

Richie breaks their kiss and sits up in bed, breathless.

"Richie?" Eddie pouts.

"Sorry! I'm sorry — I'm just nervous."

Richie's nervous? He hadn't expected that. "You are?"

"Kinda, yeah."

"I am too," Eddie admits, "But...I want this."

"Me too! It's just..."

“Just what?”

“I don’t really know what I’m doing,” Richie confesses.

“You mean you haven’t done this before?” Eddie asks, voice dry with sarcasm.

“Shut up,” Richie nudges him, but blushes. “I...uh...watched a tape, but that’s about it.”

“Wait, you rented a tape? What, from the video store?!”

“Let’s just say that I, uh, borrowed it,” Richie says nonchalantly, “Without asking.”

“I can’t believe you stole porn,” Eddie mutters, but if he’s being honest, the thought makes him feel warm. Knowing that Richie watched it and thought about him, about how to do those things with him, *to him*...

It’s a lot to take in.

“It was for scientific research!” Richie defends.

“Uh-huh.”

Richie still looks nervous and self-conscious. It's so different from his usual exuberant self.

“Is everything okay, Rich?” Eddie asks quietly.

Richie's mouth tightens. He nods.

“Richie?”

“I just want this to be good for you!”

“It will be,” he insists. He raises a hand to cup Richie's cheek, “Because it's with you. Numero uno, remember?”

“Oh,” Richie says, and his voice sounds all funny. Then he looks away and rubs his eyes a few times.

Eddie eyes him. “Are you...crying?”

“Fuck off!” Richie sniffs. “I just love you and shit, don't fucking talk to me.”

“Baby,” Eddie smiles.

“‘Baby’ like a pet name or an insult?”

“Uh,” Eddie thinks, “Both.”

Richie cracks a smile. “Fair.”

Eddie sits up in bed and kisses Richie tenderly. “I trust you,” he murmurs, pulling away, “And I love you too, idiot.”

Richie kisses him back. “Love you more, fuckface.”

“Fuck off, no you don’t.”

“I do though.”

Eddie sticks out his tongue at Richie, and Richie slips it into his mouth in another kiss. It’s somehow both messy and sweet at the same time.

“You sure you’re sure about this?” Richie asks once they pull apart.

“Richie!”

“Alright, alright! Just checking!”

“Are YOU sure you’re sure?”

“Fuck, yes!”

“Ok then!” He leans forward and pulls Richie’s shirt off, trying to hurry him along. Not that he’s in a rush or anything, but he’s worried that they’ll lose their nerve or the Losers will come back if they take too long.

Richie does the same for him before kissing him some more. Eddie relishes the feeling of their chests pressed together — the firmness of joints and muscles, and the warmth of their bodies and sun-kissed skin. Richie tastes like saltwater and marshmallows and chocolate.

When their kiss breaks, Eddie lies back down in bed and waits. Richie goes to his suitcase.

Everything will be different now, Eddie thinks, I’m doing something I can’t undo.

The realization doesn’t come with panic though, but with pure relief. Nothing will ever undo this, undo Richie.

He closes his eyes, smiles.

Good.

Notes for the Chapter:

This was supposed to be all ~implied sexual content~ but instead i made myself emo writing this and thinking about THEM whelp 🐼

7. Chapter 7

Notes for the Chapter:

Hello, everyone! Sorry this update took longer than usual. Idk why I've been writing so slow lately. I think it's just bc I've been busier and lazier and a lil sadder lately. RIP. But it's done now! Obviously.

On a happier note, I gotta meet James Ransone when he came to Chicago and he patted me on the shoulder. I died and am a ghost now.

As Eddie lays awake in the afterglow, Richie can't stop kissing him. They're lying on their sides under the covers, holding each other close. Richie's lazily peppering kisses across Eddie's shoulder, neck, and jaw.

Eddie watches him through heavy-lidded eyes. He feels sore, so much so that it's kind of painful, but in a weirdly good way.

Richie's been uncharacteristically quiet since they finished. Apparently, he's content to let his mouth just keep pressing kisses into Eddie's skin. He has one arm raised so that he can cup Eddie's face, and another around wrapped Eddie's waist, its hand resting on his hip and gradually making its way lower.

Their bodies are cooling with sweat — Eddie desperately wants a shower, but he also doesn't want to leave bed. He's comfy and loved and happy here, and his brain has temporarily turned off and stopped worrying for once.

Eddie runs his hands over Richie's back soothingly. He wonders if his

fingernails left marks from when they dug down into him earlier.

“Was it good?” Richie finally asks. He’s normally so outwardly confident in everything, even if he’s secretly self-conscious about something. It’s weird to see him just flat-out ask for approval. Eddie’s not gonna hesitate to give it to him, though.

“Yes,” Eddie kisses him sleepily. “You were great.”

“Oh,” Richie smiles in relief.

“Thanks for rocking my world.”

Richie laughs. “Thanks for rocking mine!” He holds up his hand.

It takes Eddie a second, but he tentatively raises his hand and high-fives Richie.

“Fuck yeah!” Richie beams.

Eddie blushes and tries not to laugh. “You’re so dumb!”

“Love you too,” Richie winks. And then he goes back to kissing him all over.

Eddie smiles and drags his fingers through Richie's messy hair. "Dummy."

"Idiot."

It's not like Eddie has anyone to compare Richie to anyway. He's pretty sure it was great. It'd hurt a lot at first, but then it got better, and then it got good. Really, pleasantly good. It wasn't mind-blowingly amazing, if Eddie's being honest, but he knows it'll just get even better the more they practice.

The thought makes him blush. More practice, more sleeping with Richie. More being closer to each other than ever before. More heated kisses and touches. More of that incredible expression Richie made when he came.

He involuntarily remembers a time when he was younger — 13? 14? — when his mother found out that they were going to start teaching him sex ed at school. She'd berated him over dinner — a cold, slimy meal of congealed pork chops and limp green beans — as soon as she found out.

No matter what they teach you at that dirty school, Eddie, just know that you shouldn't even think about those sort of things, not ever you must wait until you're older and find a nice girl and marry her until then, those thoughts are dirty and wrong and if you try to do it before then, you won't be able to stop it'll be all you think about just like all the dirty men in the world and you'll be dirty and wrong too.

She made it sound like a terrible, awful thing: *You won't be able to stop*. But Eddie realizes now that it sounds pretty great. He doesn't *want* to stop. He liked it, and he wants more. And he knows Richie definitely does too.

(Eddie also realizes that this is the first time in days that he's thought of his mother. He wishes he could've gone on forgetting a little longer).

Also, if that's how she felt about the idea of Eddie being with a girl, he can't even begin to imagine what she'd think about her *precious Eddie-darling* getting plowed by the infamously filthy Richie Tozier.

Eddie starts to laugh. He tries to bite on his lip and keep it down, but the laughs come out anyway.

Richie smiles and quirks an eyebrow. "What's so funny?"

"My mom would lose her shit if she knew what just happened."

"Dude!" Richie fake-gags. "Don't bring up your mom right now! Total boner-killer."

"You're the one always making jokes about her!"

"Yeah, but now I found a cuter, cooler, hotter Kaspbrak to love," Richie teases, kissing his neck again, "Don't need anyone else."

“Me neither,” Eddie mumbles as he leans into his touches. He can’t believe Richie’s still technically making jokes about his mom, and Eddie’s still into him. He’s so far gone.

“Only you, Eds,” Richie whispers against his skin, and Eddie melts.

“You’re so good, Chee,” he murmurs, “I wanna do it again.”

“What, like right now?” Richie fails to hide the hopeful lift to his voice.

“No!” Eddie nudges him, “Just...soon. I’m too sore right now.”

Richie frowns. “Wait, you are? Where?”

Eddie stares at him flatly. “Where do you think?”

Richie blushes but still looks worried. “Is it bad? Are you in pain?”

“Richie, I’m—“

“Are you?”

Eddie sighs. “A little, I guess. It kinda hurts to lie down. But I’m sure I’ll be fine—“

Richie scrambles out of bed immediately.

Eddie frowns. “Where the fuck are you going?”

Richie shimmies into his boxers. “I can’t just lie here while Eddie Kaspbrak, my boyfriend, the love of my life, the future Mr. Tozier, is in pain!”

Future Mr. Tozier. “Stop being so dramatic! I’ll be fine.”

“I’m going to make you feel better,” Richie promises. He turns back to Eddie and cups his cheeks, kissing him firmly. “Wait right here.”

“Where the hell would I go?” Eddie grumbles.

Richie just smiles and pats his cheek before he dashes out of their room.

He’s so dumb.

Eddie loves him a lot.

He cautiously sits up in bed and looks around. Their clothes are strewn about haphazardly; Richie's shorts somehow got draped over the lampshade. Beneath the lamp, Eddie-Bear sits on the nightstand, looking directly at the bed.

Eddie hesitates, but leans over and turns Eddie-Bear so that he's facing away from the bed. "Sorry," he mumbles sheepishly.

He has literally no-fucking-clue what Richie is doing, nor how long he'll be. He decides to get out of bed and at least put on some clothes. He changes into his pajama pants and walks to the bathroom with shaky legs to wipe himself off with a washcloth.

He studies his reflection in the mirror and is somewhat surprised to see that nothing's changed. His hair is messy, and he's a little flushed, but he's still him. Even though it's dumb and doesn't make sense, a part of him worried that once he finally did it, everyone would be able to know, like, just by looking at him. Like there'd be a huge neon sign above his head all, I JUST HAD SEX.

But no. He's just Eddie. Obviously.

He washes his hands and crawls back into bed, waiting for Richie to return. He seems to be taking his sweet time though, so Eddie grabs the Game Boy and tries to beat his Tetris high score (Richie says Tetris is for pussies, but he literally bought a copy just so Eddie could play it).

He's getting close to beating it when the door opens and Richie finally saunters in.

"Took you long enough," Eddie says without looking up from the screen.

"Eddie Kaspbrak," Richie says in a grandiose gameshow host voice, "May I present to you a one-of-a-kind, first-edition, spectacular, delicious, and very sexy, Spaghetti Sundae!"

Eddie looks up to see Richie sitting on the edge of the bed holding a disgustingly large sundae. He looks like he used up half of the quart-sized tub and all of the snacks they brought for the trip.

"Oh my god," Eddie says. He can hear himself lose Tetris, but he's too distracted by the sight in front of him. "What the fuck am I looking at?"

"An ice cream concoction that will put the Spaghetti Shake to shame!" Richie beams.

"Dude, you just changed the name by one word!" Eddie points out, "That's so fucking lazy!"

"How about: Eddie's Wet Dream?"

“Oh my god never mind, I take it back.”

“Eddie’s Creamy Surprise.”

Eddie gags dramatically.

Richie slides under the covers next to Eddie. He’s grinning like he’s just won a million bucks. Eddie’s just happy that he’s back — it’s pathetic, but he already missed having Richie to cuddle. He brushes his leg against Richie’s beneath the blankets, wanting to touch Richie wherever he can.

“Alright,” Eddie sighs, “What do we got?”

“Gummy bears, Lucky Charms, marshmallows, sprinkles, maraschino cherries, chocolate syrup, and,” he winks, “A banana.”

Eddie hates that he actually snorts with laughter at that. “Are you trying to kill me?” He laughs, “Like, are you actually trying to give me fucking diabetes or some shit?”

Richie just smiles and responds by feeding him a spoonful of ice cream. “Maybe. Whaddya think?”

Eddie swallows. “It’s alright, I guess.”

“Translation—“

“Don’t translate me!” He yanks the spoon out of Richie’s hand, “It’s so annoying!”

“Hey!” Richie exclaims, “Is this the thanks I get after slaving away in the kitchen to make you the world’s best sundae?”

“Thank you,” Eddie says sarcastically, even though he doesn’t mean it to be. He really is thankful, because Richie is kind of the best boyfriend ever. Eddie’s gonna have to step up his game.

He scoops up some ice cream and feeds it to Richie. “Baby,” he adds.

Richie eats it but pouts. “What the fuck? I made this for you, Eds.”

“So? You deserve some too. We can share it; you did just as much work.”

“What, fucking you?”

Eddie nudges him hard, but smiles.

Richie smiles back. “Sounds like it was good work, then.”

“It was very good work. Four stars.”

“Four stars?! What the fuck? Out of what?”

“Hopefully not ten,” Eddie smirks and tries not to laugh.

“Fuck you, dude!” Richie grabs the bowl and sets it on the nightstand. Eddie starts to laugh, knowing he’s definitely in for something.

“Maybe 3.5,” he giggles, holding up his hands in self-defense.

Richie grabs him, pins him down, and starts tickling Eddie like his life depends on it.

Eddie shrieks with laughter and squirms beneath Richie, especially when Richie leans down and blows a raspberry into his stomach.

“You’re so full of shit, Eds!” Richie huffs when he’s finished, “3.5?”

Eddie’s still laughing. Richie shuts him up with a kiss. When he pulls back, Eddie’s stopped laughing, but he’s still grinning.

“Lil shit,” Richie mutters.

“I love you,” Eddie slings his arms around Richie’s neck and kisses his nose. He feels tipsy, even though he didn’t have that much to drink.

“Flattery will get you nowhere,” Richie says, but then he’s hugging Eddie right back. They hold each other for a moment before Eddie points out that their sundae is going to melt.

“So, where is everybody?” Eddie asks as Richie retrieves the bowl.

“Still outside, it looks like. So, we don’t have to worry about traumatizing poor Ben again.”

Eddie blushes and groans. “Ugh, I can’t believe that happened — that’s so fucking embarrassing!”

“Apparently, he thought we were fighting.”

Eddie snorts. “Wait, are you being serious right now?”

“As serious as your mom’s cankles.”

“Well, that’s good, I guess,” Eddie says, choosing to disregard Richie’s joke, “As long as they don’t know.”

Richie frowns. He almost looks like he wants to say something, but doesn't. Instead, he just nods and goes back to feeding Eddie more ice cream.

They take turns feeding each other the sundae, eating in companionable silence.

It's both so different and similar to when they'd share ice cream as kids. Eddie remembers how he'd always buy an extra cone for Richie, just so Richie would notice him and smile at him. Even before he knew what it really meant, Eddie would've done anything he could to get Richie to smile at him.

It's crazy to think how far they've come since then. How their relationship has changed in some ways, stayed the same in others, ever since they first...

...Shit.

When was the first time they met? Eddie's totally blanking. The fuck?

Eddie frowns and looks up at Richie. "Can you remember how we met?"

Richie laughs a little incredulously. "What?"

"Do you remember how we met?"

Richie shrugs and feeds him another spoon of ice cream. "I dunno, in school."

Eddie swallows before he continues. "But when? How old were we? What happened?"

Richie thinks for a moment, then shakes his head. "I can't remember right now. We hung out with Bill and Stan in 6th grade, so then, probably."

"Don't you think that's weird?" Eddie asks quickly, "Don't you think we'd remember that?"

He shrugs again. "It was a long time ago. Besides," he pauses to wink, "Maybe we just fucked each other's brains out."

Sixth grade? That couldn't have been right. They had to have met before then. They went to see *Ghostbusters* when it came out in theaters, and that was when they were...8. So that would've been what? Third, fourth grade? "Yeah, maybe," Eddie mutters aloud.

Richie starts smirking all cockily, and Eddie realizes what he just agreed to.

"No!" He snaps, pointing a finger at Richie. "Shut up!"

"You agreed with me," Richie just smiles, leaning back on the pillows and helping himself to more ice cream, "That was all you, Eddie my love." He talks with his mouth full, which should be disgusting, but Eddie's dumb sappy brain doesn't process it as such.

"I was *distracted*."

"By how *in love* you are with me!"

"By the fact that my boyfriend can't even bother to remember how we met."

"You can't either, dumbfuck, so who's the bad boyfriend now?"

Eddie flicks his nose and steals the spoon. "You, dipshit."

Richie just smiles and kisses Eddie's nose in response. "I think we're just tired. And a little drunk still. Don't worry so much."

Eddie tells himself Richie's probably right and feeds him some more ice cream. His face is still settled in a worried pout though. *Why can't he remember?*

Richie seems to notice, because after he swallows, he says, "You know what I remember?"

"What?"

"Science class, 8th grade. You agreed to be my partner for the science fair and I totally lost my shit. I thought you'd wanna be with Bill or Stan, but you said yes to me, and I had to try and act like it wasn't a big deal or anything. And we stayed up until midnight making our baking soda volcano because we wanted it to be perfect."

"And because we procrastinated," Eddie smiles and rests his head on Richie's shoulder. "I remember that too. Ugh, we were so lame!"

"We were cool!" Richie insists, "Remember how we dyed the vinegar orange, so it'd look like actual lava? That was badass."

“I guess so, yeah,” Eddie admits. Then he starts to laugh. “And remember how we set up all those LEGO people beneath it, so the lava would get on them?!”

“Yeah! It was fucking funny! But then we lost points for ‘violence.’”

“Holy shit, yeah! It was total bullshit.”

“Totally.”

Eddie smiles up at him.

Richie flicks his nose. “See? I remember shit.”

Eddie flicks his right back. “Why do you remember that?”

“Because even though we didn’t win, we were really proud of what we made,” Richie says, “And afterward, you and I walked to the ice cream parlor and got some cones and just sat on the bench outside. I thought about holding your hand the whole time.”

You should’ve, Eddie wants to say, but he knows that’s not true. Holding hands was cute in elementary school, but by the time they got to middle school, doing so would’ve gotten them exactly what it got Richie for even *looking* at other boys, if not worse.

So instead, he holds Richie's hand now, intertwining their fingers and giving him a squeeze. "You can now," he offers.

Richie smiles and nods. "Yeah."

They finish their ice cream and go back to cuddling. They can faintly hear the sound of the radio still playing outside on the beach.

Eddie studies Richie's face, trying to commit it to memory for when he won't be able to see it anymore. Long eyebrows, long nose, pale skin, pink mouth.

"Hey, what made you change your mind?" Richie whispers.

"What?" Eddie murmurs back.

"You know, about being with me. Yesterday you were so freaked out, but tonight..."

"I dunno..." Eddie sighs, "I just...I don't want to waste any more time, you know? I wanted you to be my first, or whatever the hell, and I didn't want to miss my chance for that."

Richie cocks his head to the side and frowns. "Whaddya mean? You'll have all the chances you want, Eds!"

How do you tell your boyfriend that you're pretty sure you're going to be broken up by the end of the year? Eddie can't say that — Richie would be heartbroken. He's so blissfully optimistic; he wouldn't understand. And he's so happy right now, and Eddie is too, and he doesn't want to bring them down.

"I guess I got impatient or some shit," Eddie mutters.

Richie smiles. "Well, if you're ever feeling impatient again..." He pinches Eddie's cheek.

Eddie doesn't swat Richie's hand away like he normally would. Instead, he just snuggles closer and buries his face in Richie's chest. "Don't let go of me," he says against Richie's skin, "I wanna wake up with you."

Richie nods and holds him close. "Alright."

Eddie tries to imagine them older and happier, living together with their lives figured out, catching up on their workdays, snuggling like this in a bed that's theirs, domestic and blissful.

He tries, but it rings false — too good to ever be true, and he eventually falls into an anxious sleep.

Bev's lying in on her back in the sand and staring up at the stars. She likes doing this sometimes, just lying back and watching the universe. It's comforting, knowing how big it all is, knowing that there's so much out there for her to see.

Mike and Bill are still making s'mores. Stan is passed out, though Bev can't tell if he's just lying back like her, or if he's actually asleep. Ben's off to the side a few feet away, reviewing his camera footage. He keeps smiling at all of the funny things he's recorded, which makes Bev smile too. He just looks pretty adorable when he's happy, is all.

Bev turns her head to look back at the house. The light in Richie and Eddie's bedroom, which has been on since they left, turns off.

Something is still obviously up with them. *Babe?* Since when does Richie call Eddie that? And since when would Eddie not yell at him for it? Not to mention, they were totally making heart eyes at each other throughout the entire sleepover last night. It's so obvious.

She's pretty confident that she's right, but the one thing that she's definitely 100% certain of is that they weren't fighting two nights ago. She still remembers the huge, mysterious falling out that Richie and Eddie had sophomore year. They'd both been complete messes — she and Bill literally had to trick them into hanging out in order for them to make up. So, if they really were fighting again, there's no way Richie would be laughing it off the next day. They're both too sensitive, even though they'd never admit it.

So, what would they be yelling about? Video games? Keeping their room clean? But why would Richie lie about any of that?

Beverly sighs and sits up. She wants a smoke, but she left her pack in her room and she's too lazy to go all the way back inside for it. It'd be much easier to just keep sitting here in the sand, digging her toes and her fingers into it.

Bill's currently trying to see how many marshmallows he can fit into his mouth while Mike watches and shakes his head, laughing. Stan is definitely asleep. And Ben is still looking at his camera, but he's not smiling anymore.

Bev, curious, gets up and walks over to him. "Whatcha watching?" She asks, sitting down beside him. She draws her knees to her chest and rests her chin on them.

Ben blushes and sits up straighter. "N-Nothing!" He insists, quickly turning off the camera.

"Liar," Bev teases.

"It's really nothing!"

"Then why are you so nervous?"

"I'm not!" Ben says nervously. Then, only slightly more confidently, "I'm not nervous."

“Come on, Ben,” she smiles, “You can tell me.”

Ben glances down at the camera, and then his feet. “I don’t know.”

“You’ve just been recording us, right? So it’s not like there’s anything on there that I haven’t already seen in person.”

“I don’t think you saw this.”

“What?”

Ben hesitates, but continues. “I think you might have been right about Richie and Eddie.”

“Wait, really?”

“You know how I recorded our sleepover last night?”

“Yeah?”

“I accidentally left the camera running all night. I was going through the footage, and I...I think I heard something.”

Bev frowns. "Like what?"

Ben takes another moment to commit to his decision, but when he does, he gets the camera out, turns it on, and rewinds a bit. "Just...listen," he says, handing the camera to her.

The screen is completely dark as the video begins to play. Bev has to hold the camera right up to her ear, but she can hear two voices as clear as day:

M'cold. You're comfy.

What about —

They're asleep. And like I said, I'm cold. A kiss.

More Eds for me. Love you.

Love you.

Night, Eds.

Night, Chee.

The video is silent after that. Bev lowers the camera. She doesn't know why she's so surprised. She literally guessed this. Why is she surprised?

"I dunno, that just sounded weird to me," Ben mumbles, "Like something people more than friends would say."

"You think?" Bev tries to laugh, but it comes out more despondent than she intended. Finally getting confirmation that she was right was supposed to be satisfying. And it is — 100%, ten-dollars-percent — but now that the fun of the guessing game is done, she's left feeling confused. Why would Richie and Eddie hide this from them? They were all supposed to be best friends, Losers forever, and instead, Richie and Eddie were lying right to their faces and sneaking around. Didn't they trust the Losers? Or had they — she — done something wrong? Had she'd teased them too much? Said the wrong thing?

"What should we do?" Ben asks.

Beverly sighs. She leans closer to him, rests their shoulders together.

"I'm not sure."

Richie wakes up before Eddie the next morning.

Our last morning, he thinks somberly, before we leave tomorrow.

He tries not to think about that any longer than he has to. Instead, he stays in bed and watches Eddie sleep. Eddie's still in his arms from last night, still clad only in a pair of pajama pants and fading hickeys. He is warm and small and Richie is unexpectedly overwhelmed with the desire to keep him safe. So, he holds Eddie closer, kisses his forehead.

Eddie stirs but doesn't wake up. "Mor' ice cream please," he mumbles in his sleep. *Fucking cute.*

Eddie looks so relaxed when he's asleep; he's not worrying about something or over-analyzing anything. Richie loves his little freckles and his little button nose. He loves his pouty lips and the soft snores he makes.

Richie thinks about what he should do. He's impatient and lovestruck and still a little horny, if he's being honest. It's a jittering mixture of emotions that has him on edge. He could let Eddie keep sleeping, but then he'd be bored. He could wake Eddie up and whisper dirty and/or sweet nothings into his ear. He could wake Eddie up and they could just cuddle. He could wake Eddie up and they could try to go for Round 2.

Or...

Richie gets an idea, a mushier idea, and decides to go with that. He lightly kisses Eddie's forehead, careful not to wake him up, before getting out of bed. He throws on a t-shirt to wear over his boxers and

walks into the kitchen.

Bev is seated at the island, drinking a coffee and jotting down notes in one of her magazines. When she sees Richie walk in, her eyes widen.

“Morning, Bevs,” Richie yawns. He opens the cabinets and starts looking around.

“Morning,” Bev says, but her voice sounds kinda weird. Like, it’s higher-pitched than usual.

Richie peers past the cabinet door to eye her. “You good?”

She nods, smiles. “Sure!”

Richie eyes her for a moment, but shrugs. Maybe she just snuck Ben into her room again last night or something. “How do you make pancakes?”

“You don’t know how to make pancakes?”

“Uh, no?”

“You worked in a diner!”

“Yeah, as a waiter. I didn’t make the fucking food!”

Bev smiles again, this time in defeat. “You just mix one part pancake mix with one-and-a-third parts water. Then pour it over a pan, wait for it to bubble, and flip it.”

“What the fuck? That’s so much work!”

“It really isn’t.”

“Can you help me?” Richie pleads. He gives her his best Eddie-melting puppy dog pout in the hopes that it’ll work on her too.

“What are you doing with your face?” Bev asks, unimpressed.

“Bein’ cute.”

“You look like a duck.”

“What?! No!”

“You do.”

Richie pouts for real this time, so Bev sighs and gets up.

“I’ll show you.”

Richie hugs her and buries his face in her neck. “I owe you my life, Bevs! Please marry me!”

Beverly giggles and pushes him off. “I...uh...” she stalls, “No.”

There’s something still a little off about her, but Richie forgets to ask about it once they start making the pancakes. Bev walks him through making the batter and shows him how to put it on the pan, but then she claims that he’s on his own from there.

But whatever, he’s got this. He just has to wait until it bubbles, right?

Richie’s watching his pancake very intently when he hears someone call his name.

”Richieeee!”

Eddie! Richie turns down the burner a little and follows the sound of his voice.

Eddie's standing in the doorway to their room.

Richie smiles. "You need something, Eddie?"

"You weren't there when I woke up," Eddie pouts, speaking quietly. His voice is sharp with accusation, but his hair is sleep-mussed and he's wearing a t-shirt that's too big for him and he's rubbing at his eyes and he looks literally so fucking adorable Richie wants to explode.

"I wanted to surprise you with something!" Richie whispers.

"What?"

"I was going to make you breakfast in bed!"

Eddie doesn't seem impressed. "You already made me a sundae last night."

"Yeah, but that was last night. Spoiling Eds is 24/7 for me."

"I don't want food," Eddie mumbles, "I wan' you."

"Aww," Richie smiles.

“Shut the fuck up,” Eddie huffs, “Get in here.”

“I already started making the food, so, no.”

“*Richieeee*,” Eddie frowns.

Richie pushes them both inside their room and closes the door behind them. He gives Eddie a firm kiss on his mouth, then leaves a fresh hickey where his shirt is slipping off his shoulder.

“There,” Richie says, pulling away.

Eddie admires his hickey before he stands on tip-toe to kiss Richie’s nose.

Let it be known, ladies and gentlemen, that post-sex Eddie is a total mushy mess. Richie hardly knows how to handle Eddie like this. He’s like a fucking koala.

“Will you stay?” He asks, kissing Richie’s ear.

“I gotta finish the food before it burns,” Richie says, inching back towards the door again.

“Ugh.”

“Don’t miss me too much,” Richie winks.

Eddie flips him off.

When Richie returns to the kitchen, his pancake is somehow blessedly flipped over and not burned.

“You’re welcome,” Bev says. She smiles at Richie from above her coffee mug.

Richie beams. He moves to stand next to Bev and kisses her cheek. “Aw, Bev! What would I do without you?”

“Eat burnt food,” Beverly replies wryly. She ruffles Richie’s hair before pushing Richie’s face away.

Richie walks back to the stovetop to watch his pancakes more attentively.

“What did Eddie want?” Beverly asks. Her voice is going all weird again. It sounds kinda fake in how casual it’s supposed to be.

“Oh,” Richie clears his throat, “He, uh, just wanted me to pick up

some stuff I left on the floor. You know how he is.”

“Oh.”

“Yeah.” He checks his pancake; it’s done on both sides, so he puts it onto a plate and starts making another one.

“Richie?”

“Yeah?”

He turns to look at her. She’s thumbing the corners of her magazine absentmindedly, chewing on her lower lip. Richie feels his whole body tending up, bracing itself for whatever she’s about to say. He has a feeling it isn’t going to be great.

“If...something was wrong, you’d tell me, right?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, we all tell each other everything...right?” She keeps her gaze trained on him, studying his expression.

Richie doesn’t want to lie right to her face. Like, sure, he’s been hiding stuff from her — from everyone — for two years. But they’ve

all been lies by omission, really, or lies that don't really matter. She's never confronted him head-on like this, all serious.

"Uh...we usually do." Technically, that's not a lie. "I mean, you guys didn't tell me about my surprise party."

"That's different."

"Look, nothing's wrong, Bev," Richie insists. If he can't lie, the least he can do is steer this conversation in another direction, "I swear. I'm good!"

Bev just regards him for a moment further before returning to her magazine with a silent nod.

Thankfully, Eddie walks in a few minutes later, breaking their weird silence. He's wearing a bright blue Hawaiian shirt with pink flamingoes on it. It's buttoned all the way up and tucked into a pair of shorts.

"Sweet threads, Eds!" Richie remarks.

Then he realizes: that's *his* shirt. His very Floridian shirt. That Eddie is now wearing. And looking really cute in.

Richie has literally died and gone to heaven.

“Thanks,” Eddie says with a small smile that doesn’t meet his eyes.

Or, maybe not. Eddie’s not happy. Why isn’t he happy? He seemed fine last night! A few minutes ago, even!

He doesn’t get a chance to talk about it though, because moments later, the rest of the Losers wander into the kitchen, and Richie somehow winds up making pancakes for all their needy selves.

They spend most of their last day on their beach. Playing games, competing to

build sandcastles, recreating *Jaws* for Ben’s camera.

Eddie laughs and goes along with it all, but Richie can still tell that something’s not right. Yeah, he’s there, but he’s not *there*. He’s like a shadow of himself, following all the beats without the heart behind it.

Maybe that doesn’t make sense. Maybe Richie’s being overly sensitive. It’s hard to explain, but Richie knows Eddie, and he knows that he’s sad about something. Maybe he’s sad about the trip ending.

For lunch, they have a picnic on the beach. They sit in a circle on a blanket, enjoying a meal of sandwiches, chips, and lemonade. They

have to shoo away seagulls, but it's pretty relaxing otherwise. Stan keeps glancing at his shoulder, asking for confirmation as to whether it's sunburnt or not.

"I think it is," he says, "It's redder than usual."

"Well, does it hurt?" Mike asks.

"I don't know."

"How do you not know?"

"It's hot out! My whole body is redder and hotter than usual!"

"Ew, gross! No one wants to hear about your hot body, Stan!" Richie exclaims.

Eddie's keeping quiet and to himself as he eats. A seagull approaches him and tip-toes toward his sandwich. Eddie hisses and shoos it away. "Fuck off!"

Richie holds back a laugh and leans closer. "You really told him."

"They're so annoying!" Eddie grumbles. He goes back to eating his sandwich grumpily.

“Hey, Eddie.”

Eddie glances at him.

Richie pushes up the corners of Eddie’s mouth so it looks like he’s smiling. “Ta-dahhhh.”

Eddie smiles for real and nudges Richie’s hands away. “What are you doing?”

“You just looked sad. You shouldn’t be sad on vacation!”

Eddie fades. “I’m fine,” he mumbles.

“Are you sad that it’s almost over?” Richie runs a finger in circles over Eddie’s knee.

Eddie meets his gaze, saying nothing. Yes.

“Don’t worry, Eddie,” Bill assures him. Richie didn’t know he was listening in — whoops. “There’ll be plenty of time for us to do more stuff like this over the summer.”

“Right,” Eddie says.

“We can go camping like Bill said,” Richie reminds him, “We can see movies, and prom’s still coming up!”

“We’re all going to prom together, right?” Stan asks.

“Unless you wanted to ask me,” Richie winks at him.

“I’d rather die.”

Eddie finishes his food and stands up. “I’m going to go for a walk.”

The rest of the Losers eye each other, confused. “Okay...” Bill says.

Richie frowns. He was just kidding about the going-to-prom-with-Stan thing. There’s no way Eddie could think that he was being serious about that! Maybe he’s still just sad about having to go back to Derry? Or maybe he’s thinking about his mom? Richie hates not understanding Eddie.

“Do you want any company?” He asks, trying to sound like a casual friend and not a worried boyfriend.

“No,” Eddie shakes his head, “I’ll be ok.”

And then he's walking off.

Richie pouts after him.

"Maybe you should go talk to him," Ben suggests.

Richie eyes him. "Why me?!"

"Because," Ben blushes, "You guys...you're...uh..." He glances at Bev for help.

"You're good for him," Bev supplies. Then, blushing too, she corrects, "You're good *to* him. Like, talking to him."

"You're good *friends!*" Stan cuts in, looking anxious, "Like best *friends!*"

"I guess? You guys are weird," Richie mutters, but now he's blushing too. They probably look like a bunch of dumb ass tomatoes or something.

"Just go talk to him," Bill sighs, "I don't want him all upset on the ride back tomorrow."

“Alright, alright!” Richie gets up, “I’ll go cheer him up.” He leaves the picnic and follows Eddie’s footprints in the sand. They wander across the beach, toward the trees, and beyond. Past the trees is another smaller beach. It’s secluded and scattered with driftwood and shells. Eddie’s seated a few feet away from the shore, his knees pulled up to his chest.

Richie walks over to him. His heart is beating faster as he tries to think of what angle to approach this with. Funny?Charming? Serious?

He settles for sitting next to Eddie in the sand. If they moved closer, their shoulders might be able to touch, but there’s just enough distance between them to keep it from happening.

Eddie doesn’t acknowledge his arrival. He just keeps watching the water, so Richie does too.

They’re both quiet for far too long.

“You look pretty good in my shirt,” Richie begins, smiling encouragingly at Eddie, “If you want it, it’s all yours.”

Eddie just nods.

Richie tries again.

“At least there’s no seagulls down here! Probably ‘cause there’s no food.”

No response.

Richie gives up. “Oh, c’mon, Eddie. Say something! Why are you upset?”

“I’m not.”

“I know you.”

Nothing.

“Is this about last night?” Richie swallows, “Do you...do you regret what we did?”

“No!” Eddie says, and he finally doesn’t sound like a mopey robot. “Last night was perfect, Rich.”

“Then what’s wrong?”

“It’s not last night anymore.”

“What?”

“It’s our last day, it’s ending.”

“So? This is just one trip, Eds! They’ll be plenty more. Just because this vacation’s ending doesn’t mean—“

“No, you don’t get it!” Eddie turns to look at him. He looks desperate. “I’m not just talking about the trip! When I woke up today, all alone, all I could think about is how it’s all ending, everything! Not just the trip, but us too!”

Richie’s breath catches. “What do you mean, *we’re ending?*”

“I can’t stop thinking,” Eddie mutters, both to Richie and himself, “Ever since senior year started—“

“What do you mean, we’re ending?” Richie asks again. His body feels very hot and his leg starts to jitter in place. “What does that mean?”

“Are we going to break up?”

“What?!”

“I think we’re going to break up.”

“What the fuck are you talking about?!”

“We’re leaving for college in 157 days!”

“What, you’ve been fucking counting down?”

“We’re going to be 2,789 miles apart,” Eddie continues as if he didn’t even hear Richie, “How are we ever going to see each other?”

“Wait, just slow down, Eds—“

“Don’t tell me you haven’t even worried about it?!” Eddie glowers, “About how hard it’s going to be when we’re apart?”

Richie hasn’t honestly. But now he kinda feels like maybe he should have. “I’ll save up money for plane tickets! I’ll visit you on breaks!”

“So, what, like three times a year? That’s—“

“Better than nothing!”

“It’s basically nothing!”

“So, what, you just don’t want me to visit you next year?”

“That’s not what I’m saying—“

“Then what are you saying? That you wanna break up?”

“No! I’m just saying it’s probably going to happen!”

“Don’t say shit like that!”

“It’s true!”

“No, it isn’t! I’ll visit you! I’ll call, I’ll write!”

“It won’t be the same!”

“But it’ll still be us!”

“Barely! We’ll hardly ever see each other, Richie! Fuck, I can’t even fucking picture not seeing you every day.”

Richie feels his eyes smart. He's been so excited about the idea of moving to California, that's he's pushed the harsh realities of the situation aside. Now they're coming back with a biting vengeance, clawing at his insides, sinking their teeth in deep. "I don't...Eddie...I wanna see you every day."

"We won't be able to!"

"Come to California!"

"I have a scholarship for New York! You know my mom refused to pay for anything other than fucking U of Maine!"

"I know," Richie admits. It was a dumb, selfish request. He wipes at his eyes. "I don't wanna be without you, Eddie!"

"You think I do? You think I don't lie awake at night just thinking about all this shit?"

"You should've told me! I could've helped!"

"How?!"

"I don't know," Richie admits again. He's helpless and small and powerless.

“Face it, Rich, we’re doomed! Did you know that only two percent of people end up with their high school partner? TWO percent! And that’s definitely not counting two guys! For us, it’s probably fucking zero!”

“Stop!” Richie pleads. He hates hearing this shit, absolutely hates it.

“And I just know that you’re going to meet someone who’s cooler than me and—“

“Just stop talking!”

“—And even if you don’t, who’s to say you won’t just fucking forget about me—“

“*Stop!*”

“—I’m just the person you like most in Derry but once you’re thousands of miles away and there are thousands of other guys—“

“*Eddie—“*

“—I just know—“

“Just *shut the fuck up!*” Richie snaps.

Eddie falls silent immediately. His eyes are wide and watering, his mouth a flat, anxious line.

Richie pushes his glasses up and buries his face in his hands. "I'm sorry," he whimpers pathetically. He has to try not to cry, he can't cry. "I didn't mean to yell, just...please, Eds. Stop."

He hates, but can't help, the small cry that escapes him.

"I-I'm sorry," Eddie says, sounding as close to tears as Richie is. He looks away, shielding his tears, "I...I..." The thought falters and vanishes.

"I-I don't wanna lose you, Eds," Richie whispers. Tears leak and stream down his cheeks silently.

"I don't want to l-lose you, e-either," Eddie whispers back.

"I'm s-so scared."

"M-Me too."

Tumultuous, Richie thinks, *they are painfully and heart-breakingly tumultuous.*

The sky is blue-gray.

The seagulls are back, calling to each other across the horizon.

They have 157 days left.

And they are hollow and spent.

They both sit in silence, eyes watering and red, neither making eye contact. They're not sure how long they sit there, crying like children and unspeaking.

Richie keeps trying to hide his sniffles in the crook of his arm, but Eddie can still hear them. He's not sure how to comfort him.

Before them, the ocean stretches on, impassive and infinite. They stare at it blankly, both wishing it could somehow give them some answers.

"I had a plan," Richie finally says, breaking the silence. He hates how wrecked his voice sounds, hates feeling weak like this, hates how it brings him right back to *that* day.

Eddie finally turns to look at the side of his face. He can see the dried tears on his cheeks, wonders if Richie can see his too. "What?"

"We were going to go to college."

Eddie watches him.

Richie takes a breath. "We were going to go to college. I'd visit you on breaks. We'd talk on the phone all the time and probably have amazing phone sex."

Eddie can't help it, but he snorts. Fuck Richie Tozier and his irrefutable ability to make him laugh when he doesn't want to.

Richie cracks a small smile, but continues seriously, "Then we'd graduate and I could move to New York to be with you and be on SNL. And I'd get super rich so you could move in with me, and we'd be happy. And we could visit Europe and go to spas and casinos and drink legally. And I'd hold your hand and not care if anyone saw, 'cause we wouldn't be in Derry. And we'd wake up in bed together every morning and grow old together and all that stupid sappy fucking bullshit."

"You're such a sap," Eddie replies. He's still kind of crying, but also smiling as he says it.

"I told you," Richie sniffs and smiles a little more, "You fucking ruined me!"

They look at each other, each reading the mixture of pain, hope, and fear in the other's eyes.

Eddie sighs. "Richie...you know that can't happen."

"Why the hell not?"

"Because there are literally so many factors stacked against us! Like, I'm pretty sure the universe is literally conspiring to make sure that doesn't happen."

“Well, screw the universe, then!”

“But less than tw—“

“Fuck that shit!” Richie cuts in, “Guess what, Eds, ninety-eight percent of people are fucking idiots! And they don’t have what we have! We fucking invented romance!”

“What, by repressing our feelings for years?”

“By *flirting* for years.”

“You flirted, not me.”

“Please, Eds. Like you scrambling to ride my dick in the hammock every time we hung out in the clubhouse was just you bein’ friendly.”

“I—I wasn’t—I didn’t—!” Eddie sputters, blushing furiously.

Richie just winks. “Sure, Eds.”

Eddie pushes his face away playfully. Richie catches his hand and grasps it tight.

They hold each other's gaze as they hold hands. The air suddenly feels lighter, easier to breathe.

"C'mere," Richie murmurs, and it's almost the same way he said it all those years ago, that rainy night when they shared their first kiss.

Eddie moves to sit on his lap. He wraps his arms around Richie's waist and tucks his head under Richie's chin.

Richie holds him close, rocks him gently. He loves how they fit together, like they were made for this.

"Don't be scared, Eds," Richie says against Eddie's temple, "We can't be scared. We need each other."

"But what are we going to do?" Eddie murmurs.

Richie runs his fingers through Eddie's hair. "What we want."

"You make it sound so easy," Eddie grumbles.

"Because it is!"

“How?”

“Because...because I know we can’t control what happens to us, but we can control how we feel Eds, and what we do. And I know that 3,000 miles isn’t enough to keep me from loving you.”

Oh. Eddie feels like he’s in some cheesy, over-the-top romance movie. He absolutely fucking adores it. “I’ll love you forever, Chee,” he promises.

“Me too.”

Eddie snuggles him closer.

“Do you wanna break up?” Richie pokes his cheek.

“No. Do you?”

“Nope. So, it’s decided, we’re not breaking up! That was fucking easy.”

“But...what if we do? What if something happens?”

“Then we’ll find our way back to each other,” Richie promises, “I know we will.”

Eddie sits up and kisses Richie gently. He believes in Richie's dreams for fame and success, so maybe...

...maybe he should believe in his dreams for the two of them, too. Who cares if they're still in high school, or if they'll see each other less often? Maybe they could be the exceptions to all the rules, the story that gives other people like them hope.

Richie kisses him back for a bit before he pulls away. He looks at Eddie seriously. Now feels like a good time to talk about what he's been wanting to talk about. He should just go for it, right? No time like the present, and all that shit.

"What?" Eddie asks.

"I...I think we should tell the Losers. You know, about us."

Eddie draws a breath before collapsing his mouth into his signature worried pout.

"I mean, we're gonna have to tell them eventually!" Richie points out, "We can't just lie forever, especially when we start living together and never get married to girls."

Eddie has to admit that would be kinda hard to explain.

“And besides, I’m starting to feel guilty about keeping secrets from them. I think Bev knows we’re hiding something — she was all upset about it this morning. We shouldn’t have to be scared of our own friends.”

Eddie still looks worried.

“Please, Eddie,” Richie pleads, looking right into his eyes, “I’m so tired of being scared all the time. I’m just so...*tired*.”

“I just don’t wanna lose our friends,” Eddie says quickly.

“We won’t.”

“Promise?”

“On my life.”

Eddie takes a moment to think it over. He hates the idea of a Richie having to live in fear. Even though the idea of telling their friends is still scary, as always, Richie’s confidence makes him feel brave. He doesn’t want to do it *because* of Richie though, but *for* Richie. He wants Richie to always be happy and safe and loved.

“Ok,” he nods, “We...we can.”

“Really?”

“Yes.”

Richie smiles and hugs him. “Thank you,” he sighs.

Eddie hugs him back. “Anything for you, Rich,” he mumbles.

Richie smirks. “*Anything?*” He asks suggestively.

“Oh my god!” Eddie hits the back of his head. “We were having a moment and you ruined it! You’ve already gotten *everything*, you dumb horndog!”

Richie sighs again. “And I’ll remember every glorious second of it, Eddie my love.”

Eddie rolls his eyes with a huff, but keeps snuggling Richie.

Richie’s quiet for a moment. Then...

“You wanna have sex on the beach?”

Eddie nearly chokes. He pulls back to gawk at Richie. “What?!”

“Oh, c’mon! Like you haven’t been thinking about it the whole time we’ve been here!”

“I haven’t, actually!”

“Well,” Richie smiles, “Now you are.”

Eddie blushes. Yeah, okay, now he is. “Yeah, and I’m thinking I don’t want sand up my ass.”

“You could ride up top,” Richie pats his stomach, “No ass sand required!”

“You’re ridiculous!”

Richie just keeps smiling. He’s mostly teasing, but also kinda serious.

Eddie cups his cheek and kisses his nose. “Let’s just kiss. If someone walks over, I don’t want THAT to be the way we break the news to them.”

“Fair enough.”

“But...”

“But?” Richie asks hopefully.

“Maybe tonight..” Eddie muses, “After the sun goes down...”

Richie’s quite literally holding his breath.

“Who knows what could happen?”

Richie laughs. He leans close, rests their foreheads together. “Have I ever told you how much I love you, Eds?”

Eddie smiles back. “Maybe once or twice.”

Notes for the Chapter:

thanks for reading this chapter! the next one will already be the last!

also random but i'm obsessed with the idea of lil reddie going to movies together. riding in the backseat of mr. tozier's car, richie trying to act all cool, holdin hands, freaking out when they see a ghost....wow